

Phobia of dentists leads to more decay and tooth loss, new study finds

April 20 2017



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People who have a severe fear of the dentist are more likely to have tooth decay or missing teeth, according to a new study from King's College London.

The study, published today in the *British Dental Journal*, compared the oral health of people with and without [dental phobia](#). The results showed that people with dental [phobia](#) are more likely to have one or more decayed teeth, as well as missing teeth. In addition, the study found that those with dental phobia reported that their quality of life is poor.

In this study, researchers suggest that this could be that because many people with dental phobia avoid seeing a dentist on a regular basis to address preventable oral conditions. The team also found that once a visit has been made, the phobic patient might also prefer a short-term solution, such as extraction, instead of a long-term care plan.

Anxiety about visiting the dentist is common and becomes a phobia when it has a marked impact on someone's well-being. Researchers analysed data from the Adult Dental Health Survey (2009), where out of 10,900 participants, a total of 1,367 (344 men and 1,023 women) were identified as phobic.

"This phobia can have a major impact on a person's quality of life, including on their physiological, psychological, social and emotional wellbeing," said lead author Dr Ellie Heidari from the King's College London Dental Institute.

"Other research has shown that people with dental phobia express negative feelings such as sadness, tiredness, general anxiety and less vitality. An action as simple as smiling will be avoided due to embarrassment of their poor teeth."

"Our study found people with dental phobia tend to experience a range of dental diseases which result from their avoidance of the dentist. Ideally we would want to help them overcome their dental phobia and attend the [dentist](#), but in the interim perhaps we could be helping them to take good care of their [teeth](#) themselves," said author Professor Tim

Newton from the King's College London Dental Institute.

"By providing these patients with a detailed at home oral healthcare plan, dental practitioners could help reduce acute conditions with preventative care."

Provided by King's College London

Citation: Phobia of dentists leads to more decay and tooth loss, new study finds (2017, April 20)
retrieved 3 May 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-04-phobia-dentists-tooth-loss.html>

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