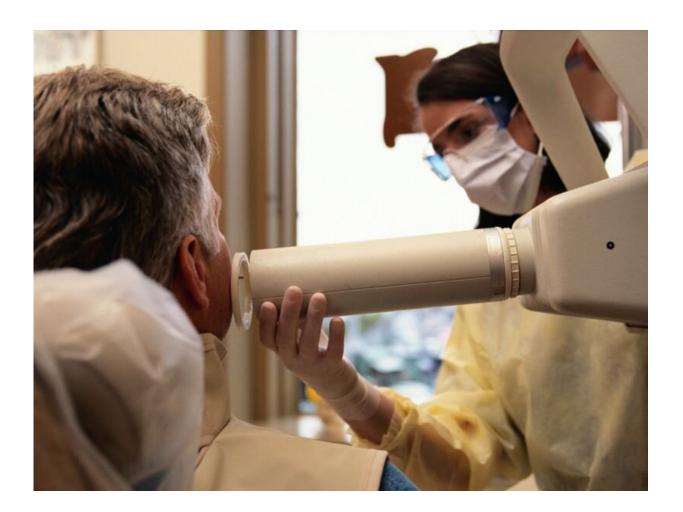# Oral surgery on your calendar? Expert offers tips to ease anxiety

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If you're planning to have oral surgery, be prepared, not scared, an

expert suggests—and stay off YouTube.

"I tell all of my patients, 'The more you know, the better it's going to be.' As health professionals, we're not trying to scare patients with information; it's just that when you're prepared for something, when you know what's going to happen, it reduces the anxiety level, and it goes more smoothly," said Dr. Maria Papageorge. She is head of the department of oral and maxillofacial surgery at Tufts University School of Dental Medicine, in Boston.

Papageorge said many patients, if not most or all, are scared when faced with oral and maxillofacial surgery. The many reasons for these types of surgery include wisdom-tooth extraction, cancer, birth defects and injury correction.

She recommends asking your doctor questions to help ease anxiety.

"I tell my patients, 'Please don't look at YouTube,'" she said. "Of course, they can, but if they have questions, they should ask us. We have the experience of having seen many patients going through similar procedures; we know what their postoperative course is, and we can relay this information to the patient effectively. The internet has a wealth of information—but sometimes that scares patients more."

Talk to others who have been through these surgeries, Papageorge suggested. They can provide information about their own experiences with the procedure and postoperative care.

"With orthognathic surgery [reconstructive surgery of the jaws], because it's extensive and there's a fairly long postoperative course, we ask patients who have already had the surgery to speak with prospective patients," she said in a university news release. "That way, they at least have reassurance from a real person who has seen the same surgeon or

been through the same institution."

Another way to prepare is to gather food and supplies you might need during recovery. After a surgery, some foods may be possible to eat and others may not be.

"What patients can eat after is a very important question. These procedures usually require a diet of soft foods for some period of time," Papageorge said. "It can be comforting for patients to know they have the necessary items at home and ready to go."

Also important: Know what your limits are before and after surgery. If you're having sedation or [general anesthesia](link), for example, you can't eat or drink anything for six to eight hours prior to surgery. Afterward, you can't drive for 24 hours.

If you have young children or others who depend on you, make plans ahead of time for their care, she suggested.

"We tell our patients that, postoperatively, they should not be taking care of someone else—they should be taken care of," Papageorge said.

Ask for help. You'll need someone you trust to take you home and to stay with you for a while. You might experience side effects from painkillers or a general reaction to anesthesia or the procedure itself, so it's important to have someone to rely on if you have nausea, vomiting or other symptoms.

"I think it helps every patient after surgery to have some [emotional support](link) at home," Papageorge said. "Even after less extensive surgeries—multiple tooth extractions, say—the diet is still affected, there's still pain. And there's still the need for reassurance and security."

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