

# TO SLEEP, PERCHANCE TO SMILE

by Laurie Sanfilippo photograph by Bill West

The dental appointment: Few notations on the calendar inspire such dread in the hearts of young and old alike.

But how would it be if we booked our dental services with the same pleasant anticipation of, say, a spa visit? What if your experience began with the greeting of a friendly dental assistant who helped you to recline onto a cozy chair? As you gazed upon the colorful artwork that adorns the walls, soothing music would lull you into a state of peaceful reception – no sharp objects in view, only the blunt, curved edges of a friendly, white machine. When the dentist entered, he would immediately put you at ease with his melodious voice and fluid gestures. He'd look deep into your eyes with soft assurance, and before you knew it, it would be time to rinse.

If this sounds like a *dream*, you're not too far off. As part of a growing emphasis on well-being, dentists like Dr. Richard Greenspan offer hypnosis to nervous patients who may feel the need to prepare for their experience on a deeper level. And while not a replacement for novocaine and other standard methods, hypnosis has become one of the newest features on the changing face of dentistry.

"To sit still with your mouth open for over an hour while someone works on your teeth and gums can be very stressful," says Greenspan. "The more agitated the body becomes, the more severe a reaction it could have to whatever invasive procedure is being performed. A patient who is relaxed will suffer less pain, less swelling, and in some cases, less bleeding than someone who isn't. The healing time is usually faster as well."

Adding hypnosis to his menu of services has proven to be fairly popular with Greenspan's patients, at a fee of \$50 per session (hypnosis is not, needless to say, covered by insurance).

"Hypnosis, like meditation, teaches patients to shift the focus from the dental chair to a more calming place through visualization," he explains. A few have found such a profound state of peace, in fact, that instead of counting the minutes they end up counting sheep. "We've actually had patients sleep during their dental work," Greenspan adds.

Trained by a pupil of famed psychothera-

pist Milton Ericksnon, Dr. Greenspan feels that the hypnosis process "is a like building a relationship. This is not a one-time thing that we perform the day of the procedure. It takes a few sessions to teach the patient how to relax and visualize. We do this in a different setting within our offices, not the actual room that causes the anxiety. The more comfortable the patient feels with me, the more receptive they are to the dental experience overall."

Comfort levels are key to Greenspan, who moved to the Sarasota area with his wife Betty, a trained nurse, 10 years ago. Moving his successful practice from Danbury, Connecticut may have been a gutsy move, but it's one that he was ready to make.

"We love the area down here," Greenspan says, "and we wanted to be here while we were still young enough to enjoy it." At the same time he was setting up shop in Sarasota, Greenspan became aware of how of alternative medicine and spa services were slowly being embraced by certain areas of the medical community. Already an enthusiast of hypnosis and meditation, Greenspan went about creating an environment that is a far cry from the clinical fear-fest of yore. In addition to the amicable décor, classical music and serene chair-side manner, patients also receive personalized attention from Greenspan, whether they opt for hypnosis or not.

"I never let a patient leave the office without the information that they need, written down, on what they can expect from the healing process," Greenspan says. "I make follow-up phone calls to each of my patients so they don't feel like they are alone. Sometimes, that assurance can make all the difference in a patient's recovery."

Greenspan also offers services in cosmetic dentistry. Recently licensed to offer BriteSmile, a professional teeth-whitening treatment said to be a favorite among celebrities and supermodels, he can potentially whiten teeth up to eight shades lighter in about an hour. The immediate



gratification of this process is powerful, and most importantly, painless.

"People can come in on a lunch hour and leave with years of discoloration removed," Greenspan notes. "There's no swelling, no adverse affects, just a beautiful new smile."

The one-time, \$500 procedure (sorry, not insured either) lasts about two to three years, depending on the how much coffee, tea, red wine, cigarettes or other staining substances your mouth endures. Using a gentle, hydrogen peroxide-based whitening gel activated by a special "gas plasma" light, BriteSmile's technology was developed by NASA scientists who also worked on the development team for Lasix laser surgery.

"Patients are amazed at the results," says Greenspan, "especially when they see the before and after Polaroids that we've take of them."

Though once thought of purely as vanity procedures, certain cosmetic services are being acknowledged for their non-aesthetic contributions.

"Something as simple as whitening their teeth can do a great deal for a

patient's self-image, which enhances an overall sense of well-being," says Greenspan. "I had an 86-year-old patient who had been taking care of her sick husband for years. She came to me to have her teeth whitened and it completely changed her outlook. It was the first nice thing that she had done for herself in a long, long time."

Despite its high demand, not everyone is a candidate for BriteSmile. Patients with caps, crowns, false teeth, gum disease, etc. would be advised against the treatment during their consultation.

So let's imagine now that your visit to the dentist office has ended. You gather up your written instructions, take one last look at your before picture, and head out into the world. Whether you just experienced a root canal or had your teeth whitened, it doesn't matter. You leave the office relaxed and relieved – with the smile to prove it. ■

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