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Only a year ago, I suffered from severe dentophobia. Now when I go and see my dentist – even for major procedures – I feel relaxed and free from any anxiety. This development is not only remarkable and pleasing, but it has also considerably improved my quality of life.

My fear of dentists dates back to my childhood – seemingly not uncommon in patients with this kind of anxiety. As the result of rather unpleasant memories of visiting the orthodontist, I had avoided even routine visits to my dentist since my late teens. In the end, this “dental abstinence” lasted for more than 20 years. For all that time, two retention brackets remained on my upper two back molars. These brackets were never designed to remain in the mouth for that long and had over recent years caused ever more problems. On a Sunday about three years ago, toothache finally motivated me for the first time to a thorough internet search on dentophobia and its possible treatments. Very soon, I got to Dr. Schulte’s website. I almost sent an email there and then, but in the end my fear was stronger. At first, I put the email of

until “tomorrow”, but then I never got beyond the thought.

Because of the reason I described, one of the affected molars broke off while I was on holidays in Portugal last autumn. An immediate visit to a dentist in Portugal became unavoidable in order to have the remaining fragment of the tooth removed, which was wobbly and painful. The visit to the local dentist resulted in two opposing experiences. The positive experience was that the wobbly section of the tooth was removed without pain. But there was also the negative one: the local dentist showed no empathy whatsoever with my phobia. However, I did follow his insistent advice to visit a dentist as soon as I returned to Switzerland. The same afternoon, I sat in the hotel gardens and searched the web for “dentist+fear+Lucerne” and soon got back to Dr. Schulte’s website. This time I did not hesitate, but sent an email with a detailed description of my problem. The reply email from Aida Hrustanovic (dental assistant in Dr. Schulte’s surgery) was not only surprisingly quick, but also very friendly and welcoming. A date for my initial appointment was thus quickly agreed. The night before my visit to the dentist, though, was anything but comfortable. I hardly slept a wink. My thoughts went round in circles, from “I am finally doing the right thing” to “It can’t be all that bad” and “I wonder what he will find”, leading to horrible visions of the actual treatment. It was with very mixed feelings that I stepped into the surgery. However, what I experienced then did not tally at all with my fears – on the contrary. The first appointment had deliberately been made for the evening, when no other patient was around. I did not have to sit around in the waiting room. I received a very friendly welcome; my first consultation with Dr. Schulte was in his office and not in the much-feared dentist’s chair. Dr. Schulte listened to my “tale of woe” with patience and understanding. This conversation laid the foundation of trust. My “agreement” to having my mouth examined and the test “How do I react to laughing gas?” were the logical consequences. My initial tension soon disappeared – mainly because of the effect of the laughing gas. I did not perceive this as unpleasant. The calm and professional approach by Dr. Schulte and his dental assistant were crucial in this. His verdict after the examination was not nearly as bad as I feared.

Considering that I had not been to a dentist for twenty years, my teeth were really not that bad. However, the brackets remaining in my mouth had caused some problems that needed remedial action. Also, two wisdom teeth needed extraction. Fortunately for me, there were no holes. However, Dr. Schulte also observed that laughing gas was not as effective for me as for many other patients. For that reason, he recommended for all actual treatments a combination of laughing gas and Dormicum which would, however, necessitate another person to drive me to the surgery and back. There followed two major treatment sessions using the agreed combination of laughing gas and Dormicum. Both of these treatments were not only absolutely pain-free, but also, much to my

surprise, even rather pleasant. Surrounded by beautiful music, I could let my thoughts drift to other realms. After all, I had nothing else to do than lying there and keeping my mouth open. These two very positive experiences motivated me to do without the Dormicum in the future. The initially discussed option of treatment under general anaesthetic (in conjunction with the surgical procedure for implanting an implant and the extraction of two wisdom teeth) was no longer an issue. Even without Dormicum, my experience remained completely positive throughout.

As a final major procedure, my implant was fitted two weeks ago. Even leading up to the appointment, I had no doubts, nervousness or even fear. On the contrary. Just before the actual appointment, I used the half hour of free time to enjoy an espresso in the nearby café and to read the paper. The procedure itself went without a hitch and seemed over in the blink of an eye. When the dental assistant assured me with the best of intentions that they were now closing the wounds and that it would very soon all be behind me, I replied: "I don't mind, you could have just carried on a bit more." And I meant every word. After only a year, I have got to the stage that I do not consider a visit to the dentist of any greater importance as one to the hairdresser. (I must admit that I still don't actually love going to the dentist, but then, who does?) The most important thing though is that I don't feel fear or anxiety either before or during treatment. It is not just nice to be able to crunch apples again with my restored teeth. At least as valuable is the experience of having overcome my strong phobia; on the whole, this is a very positive experience for me. It is part of the same thing that these days I can talk openly about a problem which I had carried around inside me for years, hidden even from the person I am closest to.

My advice to any reader who – like me about three years ago – read Dr. Schulte's website full of anxiety, but also in the search for a solution is: **Do not hesitate, face up to your fears.**

- Any pain you may experience will more than likely disappear again, but your underlying problem will remain.
- Broken teeth don't mend themselves. You can be absolutely certain: without treatment it will get worse.
- And the most important aspect: don't continue to miss out on an important part of quality of life.

Don't wait until tomorrow or even the day after before you email the dentist. Write your email today. My own experience has shown that this first step is indeed the hardest one. After that, everything almost happens by itself. My own experience has convinced me: you are not going to regret this step!