

SHORT COMMUNICATION

A Simple Technique to Control Gag Reflex

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ABSTRACT

Gagging in dental patients can be disruptive to dental treatment and may be a barrier to patient care, preventing the provision of treatment and prosthodontic rehabilitation. The management of gagging depends on its severity and causes. Several methods have been proposed to manage the gag reflex, with varying degrees of success. A simple technique of systematic desensitization using patient's thumb has been explained to deal with the gagging problem.

Keywords: Gagging, Thumb, Massage

How to cite this article: Dhamankar D, Sashipurna C, Khond K. A Simple Technique to Control Gag Reflex. *Int J Dis Prev Control* 2018;1(1):27-27.

Source of support: Nil

Conflict of interest: None

INTRODUCTION

Exaggerated gag reflex makes prosthodontic procedures and ability to wear the dentures extremely difficult.^[1]

Various methods to manage the gag reflex such as behavioral techniques,^[2-7] hypnosis,^[8] acupressure,^[9] acupuncture,^[1] and pharmacological techniques^[10,11] have pros and cons. Choice depends on the patient, dentist's experience, and method of ease.

In systematic desensitization, the patient's phobias are altered by positive experience, relaxation, and reassurance. Patient is exposed to mild aversive stimulus, following which the intensity, duration, and frequency of the noxious stimuli are strategically increased, thus habituating the patient to discomforts.

In the proposed technique, patient's thumb is used to produce noxious stimulus in a controlled step-wise approach.

PROCEDURE

1. Instruct the patient to massage the palate with the palmar surface of the thumb

2. Check the maximum extent to which patient is able to place the finger without an urge to gag and mark that line on thumb corresponding to maxillary incisors or ridge with indelible ink
3. Three lines are marked 3 mm, 6 mm, and 9 mm away from the marked line indicating three levels
4. Advise the patient to massage the palate for 2 min, 3 times a day on 1st two days, followed by 5 min/3 times for next 2 days with his thumb at the second level
5. Increase the thumb level, duration, and frequency of palatal massage for the next 4 days
6. This procedure will habituate soft palate to the impression material and denture
7. Similarly, use forefinger in distolingual areas

CONCLUSION

This thumb technique is effective in controlling the gag reflex and enhances patients' ability to wear dentures.

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