Study: laughing gas found to be more effective under hypnosis

The pain-relieving effects of nitrous oxide — laughing gas — may be enhanced by suggestion or hypnosis, according to a new study by University College London (UCL).

The study, published online in the journal Psychopharmacology, found that the nitrous oxide boosted imaginative suggestibility by approximately 10 percent, despite participants’ expectations regarding the effects of the drug. The findings indicate that dental patients may benefit from being coached to relax while undergoing sedation.

“Nitrous oxide is one of the most widely used yet least well understood anaesthetic gases and until recently, relatively little was known about how it worked inside the body,” Dr. Matthew Whalley, honorary research fellow at UCL, stated. “Many dentists use laughing gas to relieve discomfort in their patients, and our study suggests that combining the gas with instructions and suggestions to help them relax and become absorbed in imagery, for example, might enhance the pain-relieving effect.”

Whalley said an estimated number of 500 dentists in the UK have been trained to use hypnosis, and that they find that their patients respond well to being spoken to in a quiet, hypnotic manner.

The new findings suggest that these effects could be further enhanced with laughing gas, he added.

JOP study: preserving your gum line can improve your ‘bottom line’

Faced with plummeting investments and an unstable job market, many Americans are feeling the effects of the recent economic crisis. In fact, a recent study by the American Psychological Association found that more than 80 percent of Americans rank money and the economy as significant causes of stress. And while chronic stress can lead to a host of health problems, including a weakened immune system and increased blood pressure, it can also take its toll on personal health decisions.

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In the study, 56 percent of participants self-reported that stress led them to neglect regular brushing and flossing. In addition, the hormone cortisol may also play a role in the connection between stress and gum disease. Chronic stress is associated with higher and more prolonged levels of cortisol; previous research has shown that increased amounts of cortisol in the bloodstream can lead to a more destructive form of periodontal disease.

“During periods of high stress such as what we are currently experiencing, individuals should seek healthy sources of relief such as regular exercise, eating a balanced diet, and getting adequate sleep,” Cochran said. “Doing so can help maintain a healthy mouth, and potentially help ward off other negative health concerns.”

Preserve your gum line, improve your ‘bottom line’

Reducing stress in an effort to avoid gum disease may not only help sustain overall health, but it might also help your pocketbook as well. A study published in the December 2007 JOP found preventing periodontal disease may be one way to help lower your total health care expenses.

In the study, patients with severe periodontal disease had 21 percent higher healthcare costs as compared to those with no periodontal disease. Severe periodontal disease (periodontitis) involves both bone loss and diminished tissue attachment around the teeth. And because past research has shown that periodontal disease may lead to other serious health conditions, striving to maintain oral health may help diminish the need to incur additional health care expenses, and ultimately help reduce overall health care spending.

“In these stressful times I encourage my patients to pay even more attention to their teeth and gums,” Cochran said. “And in turn, since preventing gum disease may help reduce overall health care expenses, maintaining a healthy mouth may actually be a stress reliever in itself.”

(Source: American Academy of Periodontology)

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