

REVIEW

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Sound waves soothe away fear of the dentist

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FEAR FREE: Nervous dental patient Sophie Takis tries out the new device

New technology that experts claim can calm the brain is being used by British dentists to relax nervous patients, writes Anastasia Stephens.

Developed by American neuroscientists, the equipment, called NuCalm, induces a state of deep relaxation even in highly anxious patients.

Using a system known as cranial electrotherapy stimulation (CES), NuCalm consists of a generator and a headset that transmits relaxing electrical and sound frequencies to the brain. After about five minutes, brain waves have been shown to slow to a state that is associated with deep relaxation, meditation and sleep.

Patients are also asked to wear dark glasses and are given tablets

of a brain chemical called GABA – commonly available as a nutritional supplement – both of which deepen the calming effect.

Clinical trials have established that CES is effective at treating a range of stress disorders, including insomnia, chronic anxiety and post-traumatic stress. It is thought to encourage the release of brain chemicals serotonin and dopamine, which are associated with relaxation and feelings of wellbeing.

A recent placebo-controlled double-blind study by an American dentist, published in the Academy of General Dentistry journal, found all nervous dental patients who had CES during their treatment saw their anxiety

symptoms improve by 50 per cent or more.

'With NuCalm, patients enter the alpha stage of sleep – the state of deep relaxation and drowsiness that occurs between true sleep and waking – without drugs or side effects in a few minutes,' explains Dr Mervyn Druien, of London Cosmetic Dentistry and the first UK dentist to use the equipment.

'Patients are awake and can respond to my voice but they don't feel anxiety or tension. Overall, the effect is powerful. I've seen patients with a nervous temperament remain completely relaxed.'

Like thousands of others, Sophie Takis has always been frightened of going to the dentist. The

22-year-old assistant manager from North London says: 'I used to feel really anxious and would start trembling in the dental chair. I dreaded appointments and would always try to put them off.'

Yet thanks to the NuCalm headset, Sophie's last appointment in early April was a surprisingly refreshing experience. 'Since I'm having eight veneers, the appointment involved a lot of drilling and lasted for several hours,' says Sophie.

'Usually I'd be shaking with nerves. With the NuCalm, my whole body became noticeably relaxed and stayed that way.'

'Normally the sound of the drill would make me jumpy but I was so calm it didn't bother me.'