

Us Redheads and Our Dental Experience...

The hairs on my face, when left to their own devices, grow to become a bright, reddish-orange color. They are not quite as noticeable when I keep things trimmed and tight, but a long weekend hunting or fishing makes my red beard stand out. The positive is that the extra shag helps to hide my annual “holiday chins” that I develop from too much turkey and holiday cheer. Someday, as my kids grow up and I lose all of my hair up top, I too will be a true redhead.

I am concerned because there is actual research that shows that redheads are twice as likely to avoid trips to the dentist as brunettes. Yes, someone, somewhere, paid for that study. It’s an interesting observation, but why?

As with many aspects of whom we are, the reason we redheads avoid dentists is hidden in our genetic code. The actual gene that codes for red hair, also codes for true redheads to be more sensitive to pain. This sensitivity to pain makes dental appointments that much worse. The hair color has nothing to do with it, but red hair is a marker for someone who may be more sensitive to pain.

It is also theorized that people with red hair require a larger quantity of dental anesthetic to get numb for dental procedures. In general, this might also apply to other medical procedures where anesthetic is required. I’m sure that I’d be less likely to go to the dentist if I knew in advance I was going to need extra shots.

Difficulty getting numb is not limited to people with red hair. We dentists see quite a few patients who have had bad experiences and/or could not get numb for previous dental procedures. It is a common occurrence because we humans are all wired a bit differently from each other. It’s all in the genes. Also, various drugs affect us all in various ways.

The good news is that there are solutions. If you’ve had experiences where you did not go numb and were uncomfortable with treatment, let your doctor know. Sometimes a combination of different anesthetics can do the trick. Other times, it may take a little more patience and time for the anesthetic to totally knock out your nerves. An oral premedication of sedative can also help to take the edge off of dental procedures. If all else fails, treatment can be done under intravenous sedation, while the patient is asleep. With today’s technology, nobody should have to suffer through painful dental treatment, not even those of us with red hairs.

Until next time, keep smiling.

-Please send comments to Drs. Parrish at ParrishDental.com.