

Rubber Dam article for IDA magazine

Psychology of the Rubber dam placement procedure!!

One dentist asked me, "Do you really use Rubber dam for all your endo cases?" A total disbelief in his eyes.

Now I am used to such questions! I didn't blame him, in fact, in my 21 years of dentistry practice, I also had such reservations in my mind for the first half of my practice!



When one acquires any skill, **decision making** and **execution** are two important steps!!! The first step is to understand the importance of learning it and make decision to learn it!!! Then comes the execution of learning, practising and attaining skill. Unlike any other clinical skill in dentistry, Rubber dam procedure itself is quite simpler but to overcome the objections is more difficult.

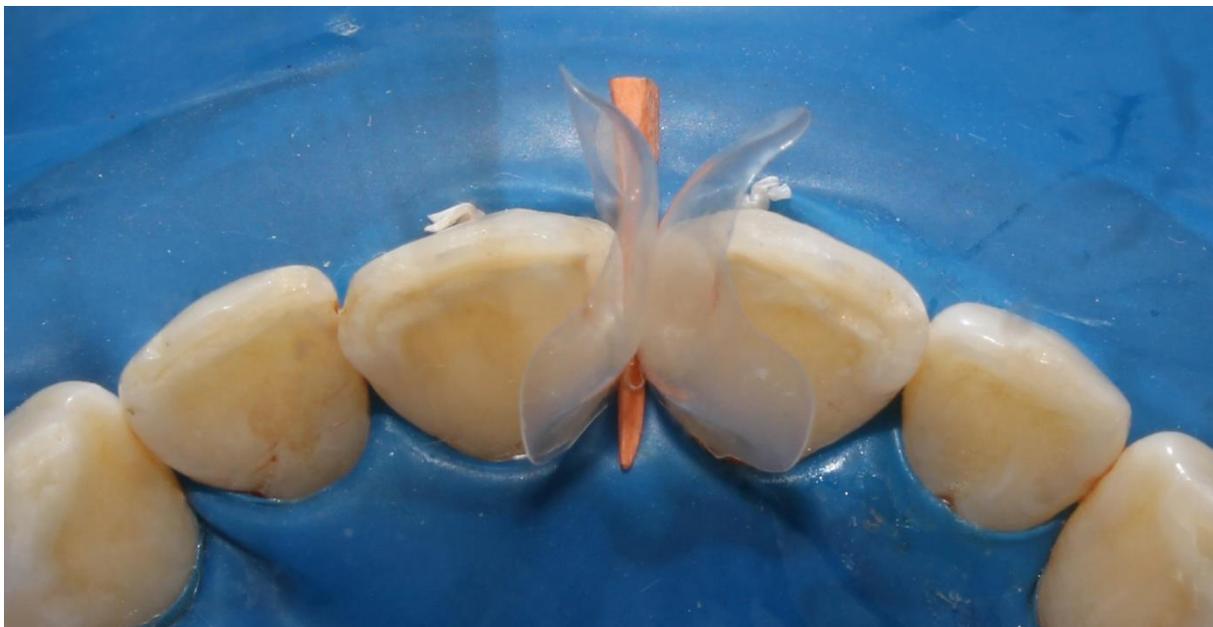
We have to address these objections and reservations more than the technique and procedure itself because the **procedure** is much easier than overcoming our **mind blocks!!**

In this article, I am discussing only the psychology of the dentist regarding Rubber dam procedure.

A general perception is -- **Rubber dam is not necessary. It is only a thing to be talked about and written about in Exams and journals.** What is the reason for such belief? Why don't most dentists place rubber dam in their practice? It is quite interesting to observe these patterns in the psychology of any dentist regarding the rubber dam procedure.

Rubber dam placement in dentistry has many advantages and we all get good marks by writing descriptive multiple pages long answer for decades! But unfortunately, very few teaching institutions have made it compulsory for their undergraduate students!

If rubber dam placement in endodontics, is the **basic standard of care** and it is for the **safety** of the patients, why don't we feel like placing the dam for the benefit of our patients?



Dentists give many excuses for not placing a dam but their main reasons are as follows—

1. **Time:** We don't have time. It takes time to place a dam. We have many patients to manage in a day!
2. **Cost:** I can't afford extra equipment and material required.
3. **Patient acceptance:** My patients refuse to accept the rubber dam in their mouth.

But if I probe further on their excuses, and ask them, "Have you really tried dam placement in your practice?" Most of them will say, "No, I haven't". Then how do they know that it takes time or their patients don't accept it?

What I have observed over the years, is these are the most superficial excuses routinely given by dentists.

There are a few more real reasons behind these superficial reasons and no one likes to accept them; some may get offended as well if you discuss the real reasons with them.

1. I did not learn this in my college.
2. I have never seen anyone working with the rubber dam.
3. I did not think that it is so easy to place a rubber dam.
4. I never thought that it is so easy for a patient to accept this!

All these three important doubts (Time, Cost and Patient Acceptance) can easily be answered if one watches a dentist working with a rubber dam!

1. **Time:** In fact, Rubber dam saves overall time! Time to place the rubber dam for a single tooth endo is not more than half a minute but you save a lot of time when your patient does not stop the procedure, talk or keep on rinsing his mouth hundred times during endodontic procedure!

2. **Cost:** It is a one-time investment for the equipment, clamps last really long, rubber dam sheets require a recurrent cost of around 15 Rs per patient.

3. **Patient acceptance:** If you really worry about it, observe a patient under a rubber dam. Get a feedback from them or the best way is to get a treatment done on yourself! Experience it and then you will know!! It is easier, patient feels much safer, patient can swallow and continue breathing comfortably! Even a mouth breather can accept the dam placement easily!!!

If you place the dam fairly quickly, it is painless and nonleaking, patients definitely accept it!!

A few good dentists understand the importance of Rubber dam, they learn the procedure in a course, buy the kit but they don't start using the dam. So, their rubber dam kit lies in the deepest compartment of their cabinet for years!!



But there is one more type of dentists which is **Argumentative!!!** They will utilize all their energy in refusing the obvious fact that Rubber dam is necessary in Endodontics and Bonding procedures. It is almost funny to listen to their crazy reasons for refusal to place a rubber dam!!! Those include

1. It is just a social media hype.
2. It is only for the exams and the real clinical dentistry does not need it!
3. It is impossible, useless and photoshopped.
4. We did successful endo without dam for last fifty years and who are these people to doubt our skill and integrity?
5. It is all conspiracy of foreign companies and foreign media!!

However funny they may sound; you will still find a few such argumentative dentists around you!!



The usual steps in a rubber dam journey of a dentist are:

1. Stage of ignorance : Lack of knowledge, never know that such thing exists.
2. Stage of Denial : They are sure that they don't need it. **"Not for me"**
3. Stage of acceptance : I must learn it. Find a course, mentor, observe others.
4. Stage of struggle : Intermittent use with difficulty
5. Stage of practice : Frequently used for most cases, then all cases
6. Stage of expertise : Start teaching and inspiring others.

Reaching stage three is an important phase in this journey! When you are at this level, always learn from those who are at next level. Never discuss your issues with stage 2 dentists who are in denial!

When you really start feeling like learning about dam placement, discuss your doubts with those dentists who are regularly placing Rubber dam in their practice. Meet them, observe them while they are working!!! If you really want to learn about placing rubber dam, please avoid discussing it with argumentative dentists who are ever in denial! It is highly likely that they will brainwash you and you will never feel positive about it ever again and you will again go back to stage 2!



I regularly speak with younger dentists during a rubber dam presentation and demonstration; and my observation is - younger dentists are more receptive to accepting rubber dam in their practice and many experienced dentists spend all their energy in refusing it or even doubting the need of it!

Staying ahead of others in today's competitive world requires constant improvement and being different than others! Start improving your Endodontics and Bonding procedures by learning Rubber dam and practising it every day!!

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