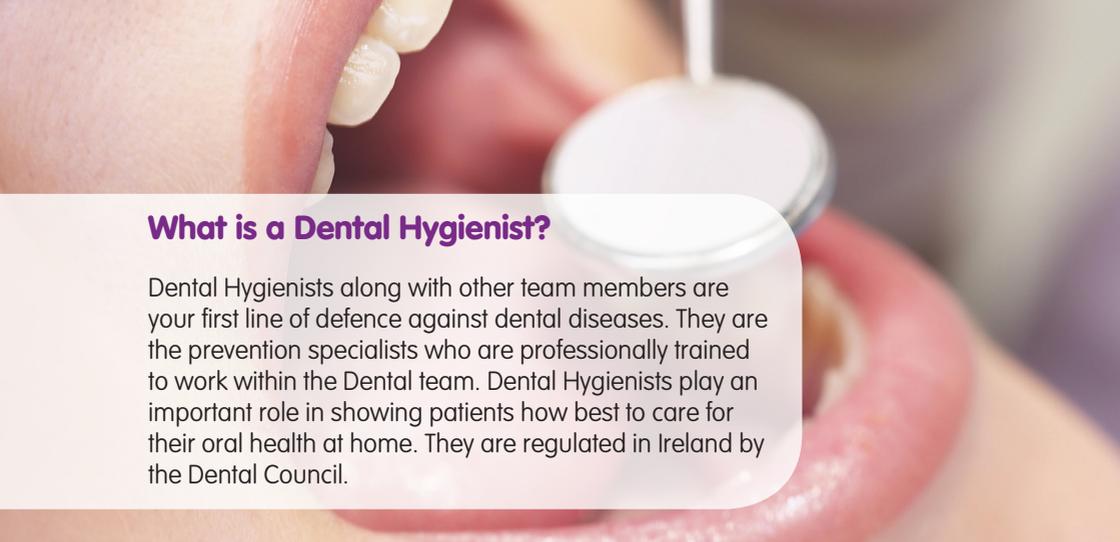




Visiting the Dental Hygienist



IRISH DENTAL HYGIENISTS ASSOCIATION



What is a Dental Hygienist?

Dental Hygienists along with other team members are your first line of defence against dental diseases. They are the prevention specialists who are professionally trained to work within the Dental team. Dental Hygienists play an important role in showing patients how best to care for their oral health at home. They are regulated in Ireland by the Dental Council.

Who can visit the Dental Hygienist?

Visiting the Dental team early is the best way of maintaining oral health and introducing your child to the dental environment. Patients must first visit the Dentist and then be referred to the Dental Hygienist for treatment. Everyone can visit, from expecting Mums, toddlers, children, adolescents and grandparents too!

What is the role of the Dental Hygienist?

The main role of the Dental Hygienist is to help patients prevent any dental problems. They professionally scale and polish (clean) the teeth. A crucial role is in showing the patient the best ways to keep the teeth plaque (bacterial film related to gum disease and decay) free at home.

What treatments can the Dental Hygienist do?

- **Scaling and polishing of teeth** – this removes harmful plaque and calculus (tartar) and stain from the teeth. Deeper scaling (debridement) which includes cleaning the roots of teeth may be required for some patients. Each patient's mouth is unique and therefore your dentist along with your dental hygienist will tailor a treatment plan to your needs. Some people will require one visit however sometimes more visits are necessary. Local Anaesthetic may be used in some cases.
- **Diet Advice** – Dental hygienists can provide practical advice on how diet and nutrition affects your mouth. This can help you prevent dental decay, erosion (tooth wear) from acidic foods and drinks and also reduce some types of sensitivity.

- **Oral Hygiene Advice** – this is perhaps the most important role as it helps teach you how to keep your mouth healthy through correct brushing and cleaning in between your teeth with floss or specific brushes. Practical advice on how foods, drinks and lifestyle can affect your teeth can be provided.
- **Fissure Sealants** – a thin protective coating placed on the biting surface of back teeth. It helps prevent decay and are commonly placed on children's teeth or those at risk of developing decay.
- **Application of gels** – patients with greater risk of decay can benefit from fluoride treatments. Other gels and solutions can also be placed on the teeth and gums to help with sensitivity and bacteria under the gum.
- **Smoking Cessation** - Your Dental Hygienist can advise you how best to quit smoking. Research shows that smokers have higher rates of gum disease than non- smokers.
- **Halitosis (Bad Breath)** - If you are concerned about bad breath your dental hygienist can discuss the possible causes and options of treatment available to you.
- **Radiographs (X-Rays)** can be taken if requested by the dentist.
- **Sensitivity** - your dental hygienist can advise you on a range of desensitising products available to help relieve sensitivity. In some instances they can paint a thin liquid over the surface of exposed root surfaces to give instant relief from painful stimuli such as cold or hot drinks.

Why is it important to visit the Dental Hygienist?

Regular cleaning and in some cases deeper scaling (cleaning under the gum) helps prevent tooth decay, inflammation of the gums (gingivitis) and bone loss (periodontal disease). Having a clean mouth will help you keep your teeth, improve appearance and give you fresher breath. After your visit, teeth will feel cleaner and may appear whiter. A key factor in keeping your mouth healthy is regular attendance. Patients who attend regularly tend to need the least amount of work carried out due to the fact that the mouth remains in a healthy state and problems are picked up early. To get the most from your Dental Hygiene visits, always follow the advice and instructions given by your dental professional.

Do all Dental Practices have a Dental Hygienist?

Not all practices have a dental hygienist, so ask your dentist to refer you to a dental hygienist within your area.



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