



# Mouth Matters

Information to help keep your smile and your overall health the best they can be

## Make the most of your visit. Talk with your dentist.

Your dentist is your biggest ally when it comes to your oral health. That's why you should talk with your dentist and share anything that may help him or her diagnose problems or treat you appropriately. Tell your dentist:

- **Your fears** — If you fear you have a particular disease or condition, let your dentist know so he or she can look for signs and either set your mind to rest or make a definitive diagnosis. Often, just talking about your fears will take some of the edge off.
- **Your overall health** — Even diseases that seem to be unrelated to the mouth may require a different approach to dental treatments or prevention. Also, bring a list of all medications you are taking, with dosages. Some medications cause dry mouth, which can increase the risk of cavities. Your dentist also will want to check that any medication he or she prescribes doesn't interact with medications you already are taking.

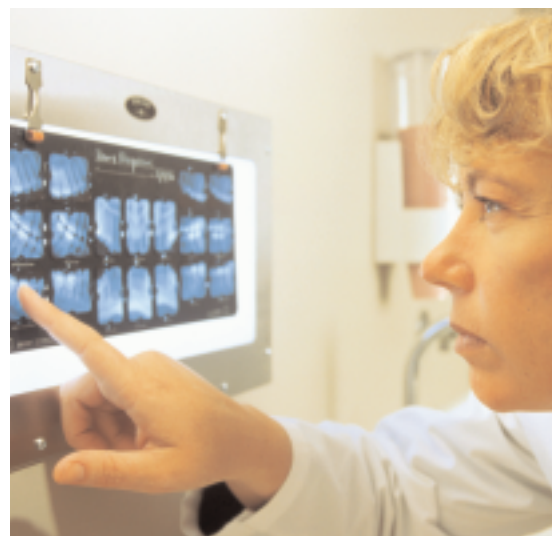
## Your Dental Visit: What To Expect

### The Comprehensive Visit

During a comprehensive examination, your dentist will look at much more than just your teeth. He or she will check other areas inside and outside your mouth for signs of disease or other problems. A comprehensive examination likely will be done the first time you visit a dental office. Even if you have had regular care under another dentist, your new dentist will want to become familiar with your health so that he or she can notice changes or problems more easily during future visits.

*The comprehensive exam likely will include these evaluations:*

- **Head and neck** — Your dentist will look at your temporomandibular joint, your salivary glands and lymph nodes in your neck area. He or she will also look at your face, neck and lips to make sure there are no unusual swellings, lip dryness, bleeding or other abnormalities that need to be checked further.
- **Soft tissue** — Soft tissues of the mouth include the tongue, the inside of the lips and cheeks and the floor and roof of the mouth.
- **Periodontal** — Your dentist will check the gums and supporting structures of the teeth.
- **Occlusion** — Your dentist may check how well your teeth fit together by examining your bite.
- **Clinical examination of teeth** — Your dentist will check for decay by examining every tooth surface visually (using a mirror to see the back sides of teeth) or with a dental instrument.
- **X-rays** — Also called radiographs, X-rays will be taken to help your dentist look for decay or other oral health problems.





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## The Checkup

During a checkup visit, you sometimes will see two professionals — your dentist and the dental hygienist if the office has a hygienist on staff. The hygienist will typically check your gums and teeth, clean and polish your teeth and talk to you about caring for your teeth and gums properly at home. Your dentist also may do a clinical examination, diagnose problems and make treatment recommendations. *Here's what to expect:*

- **Cleaning** — A professional dental cleaning will remove the hard calculus (also called tartar) from above and just below the gum line. Brushing and flossing at home removes plaque, but only dental instruments can remove calculus.
- **Polishing** — After the calculus is removed, the crowns of your teeth (the parts that show) may be polished to remove plaque and surface stains.
- **Prevention** — The hygienist may offer additional instructions for oral care at home based on the results of the exam. He or she may demonstrate how to brush and floss properly.
- **X-rays** — Also called radiographs, X-rays may or may not be taken during your checkup. Your dentist should take into consideration the results of your clinical examination, your dental history and your individual risk for developing cavities.
- **Treatment recommendations** — If your dentist finds any problems during the examination, he or she will make recommendations for the next steps to fix them. These may include a referral to a specialist (such as a periodontist or orthodontist), further tests for diagnosis, or a suggestion that you return for restoration work or more intensive periodontal cleanings.

Information for this flyer was taken from [www.simplestepsdental.com](http://www.simplestepsdental.com) and was reviewed by the faculty of Columbia University's School of Dental and Oral Surgery.

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## Did you know?

There is compelling research indicating a strong connection between health problems — such as diabetes, heart disease, and pregnancy complications — with the presence of oral disease and infection.