CAREER INFORMATION

WHO IS THE REGISTERED DENTAL HYGIENIST?

The dental hygienist is a licensed health care professional who is a member of the health care team and who focuses on the prevention and treatment of oral diseases.

WHAT IS MEANT BY THE “RDH” DESIGNATION?

The “RDH” means “Registered Dental Hygienist.” The RDH credential identifies a dental hygienist as a licensed oral health professional. State licensure requirements typically indicate that a dental hygienist must graduate from an accredited dental hygiene education program, successfully pass a national written examination and a state or regional clinical examination.

MUST A DENTAL HYGIENIST BE LICENSED?

Dental hygienists must be licensed. Licensure is state regulated and is the strongest form of regulation used today. A state license to practice dental hygiene assures the public and other professionals that you have completed a nationally accredited dental hygiene program and successfully passed a national written examination and a state or regional clinical examination. Examples of other licensed health care providers include dentists, physicians, nurses and physical therapists.

WHAT IS THE DENTAL HYGIENE SCOPE OF PRACTICE?

The dental hygienist is a licensed dental health professional who provides educational and therapeutic services and promotes total health through the maintenance of optimal oral health.

Each state has its own specific regulations and the range of services performed by dental hygienists varies from one state to another.

At Harper College, dental hygiene is a career program leading to an Associate in Applied Science Degree. Throughout the five-semester curriculum the dental hygiene student will provide care and treatment to help patients prevent oral diseases such as dental caries and periodontal disease. They also educate patients about maintenance of optimal oral health. The dental hygienist is especially knowledgeable about the preventive aspects of dental disease and the early recognition and treatment of periodontal disease.

As defined by the Illinois Dental Practice Act, upon graduation from an accredited dental hygiene program in the State of Illinois the graduate is competent to perform the following functions:

- Collect assessment data and review patient’s health profile
- Monitor patient’s vital signs, including blood pressure
- Examine the teeth and oral structures
- Examine and chart oral tissues
- Plan for dental hygiene treatment and control of disease
- Perform periodontal debridement (scaling and plaque removal)
- Apply caries preventive agents such as fluoride, varnishes, sealants and desensitizing agents
- Administer and monitor administration of nitrous oxide
• Administer local anesthesia
• Teach patients proper oral hygiene techniques to maintain healthy teeth and gums
• Counsel patients about plaque control and develop individualized at-home oral hygiene programs
• Provide dietary analysis education and counsel patients on the importance of good nutrition for maintaining optimal oral health
• Expose (or digitally capture), process and interpret dental radiographs
• Educate the individual patients, general public and special population groups about the importance of health-promoting oral hygiene practices
• Conduct oral health screenings
• Design and implement community dental health programs
• Promote health and wellness programs
• Provide consumer education

WHAT EDUCATION IS REQUIRED FOR A DENTAL HYGIENIST?
Dental hygienists are graduates of accredited dental hygiene educational programs in colleges and universities and must take written and clinical licensing examinations before they are allowed to practice. Most dental hygienists work in private practice, but other opportunities exist to include employment as:

• Educators
• Administrators
• Business managers
• Researchers
• Consultants

WHAT ARE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE DENTAL HYGIENIST?
A dental hygienist may work in such practice settings as:

• private dental offices and dental clinics in general dentistry and the specialties
• federal, state and local health departments or associated institutions
• hospitals and nursing homes
• school districts or departments of education
• educational programs for dental, dental hygiene and dental assisting students
• private business/industry
• correctional facilities
• private and public centers for pediatric, geriatric and other individuals/groups with special needs
• health maintenance organizations
• insurance companies
• dental equipment and supply companies

WHAT IS THE JOB OUTLOOK FOR DENTAL HYGIENISTS?
Refer to subsequent pages for information regarding employment and the job outlook for dental hygienists.
Section 1220.240 Prescribed Duties of Dental Hygienists

a) Dental hygienists may perform the operative procedure of dental hygiene, consisting of oral prophylaxis procedures.

b) Dental hygienists may perform dental health education functions and may record case histories and oral conditions observed.

c) Dental hygienists may perform all procedures that may be performed by an appropriately trained dental assistant.

d) Dental hygienists shall not perform those procedures that constitute the practice of dentistry as described in the Illinois Dental Practice Act. Hygienists may not perform procedures that require the professional judgment and skill of a dentist. Such prohibited procedures include, but shall not be limited to, the following:

1) Making denture adjustments.

2) Condensing or carving amalgam restorations.

3) Placing and finishing composite restorations.

4) Taking final impressions for the fabrication of prosthetic appliances, crowns, bridges, inlays, onlays or other restorative or replacement dentistry.

5) Permanently cementing permanent crowns or bridges.

6) Permanently re-cementing permanent crowns or bridges that have come loose.

e) Dental hygienists may administer and monitor nitrous oxide under the following conditions:

1) The dental hygienist functions under the supervision of the dentist who must
remain in the facility;

2) The dental hygienist may administer (start the flow of) nitrous oxide to the patient and control the induction of the gas, so that the patient is at a level of analgesia not anesthesia;

3) The dental hygienist may remove the patient from nitrous oxide when the hygiene procedures have been completed;

4) Proof of Completion
   A) The dental hygienist is responsible for obtaining proof of certification, validating completion of a 12 hour course relative to nitrous oxide analgesia and submitting certification to the dentist of valid completion of the required course. The course shall have been completed no earlier than December 31, 1994.
   
   B) A dental hygienist who completed the 12 hour course shall complete an additional 2 hour course in nitrous oxide analgesia administration. The course shall be completed by September 30, 2011. A dental hygienist who has not completed the 12 hour course shall complete an approved course of 14 hours relative to the administration and monitoring of nitrous oxide analgesia and submit certification of successful completion to the dentist. The course shall have been completed no earlier than January 1, 1998.
   
   C) An individual who graduated from an approved dental hygiene program after January 1, 1998 that contained nitrous oxide analgesia administration and monitoring in the curriculum shall not be required to complete the 14 hour course upon proof to the dentist of the required curriculum.
   
   D) A dental hygienist who has not completed the 12 or 14 hour course shall complete an approved 6 hour course relative to the administration and monitoring of nitrous oxide analgesia and submit certification of successful completion to the dentist.
   
   E) Proof of nitrous oxide analgesia education shall be made available to the Division upon request. The required hours shall include both didactic and clinical components and be given by a continuing education sponsor approved pursuant to Section 1220.440 or a dental hygiene program approved by the Division pursuant to Section 1220.250;

5) The dental hygienist must maintain Basic Life Support for Healthcare Providers certification or its equivalent, which will be in addition to the required courses. Certification or its equivalent shall be completed by September 30, 2011.

f) Dental hygienists may assist in the provision of moderate sedation (conscious
sedation), deep sedation, and general anesthesia, as defined in Section 1220.500, under the following conditions:

1) The dental hygienist functions under the supervision of the dentist who must remain in the facility. When the hygienist is the treatment provider while the patient is under moderate sedation (conscious sedation), deep sedation, or general anesthesia, the anesthesia permit holder must remain in the treatment room;

2) The dental hygienist is responsible for obtaining proof of certification validating completion of a course or courses totaling 12 hours or more. The course or courses shall include areas of anatomy, physiology, pharmacology, monitoring and emergency procedures with an emphasis on airway management. The required hours shall include both didactic and clinical components and be given by a continuing education sponsor approved pursuant to Section 1220.440 or a dental hygiene program approved by the Division pursuant to Section 1220.250;

3) If the dental hygienist has complied with the provisions set forth in subsection (e)(4), the dental hygienist may complete an additional course or courses totaling 6 hours or more on advanced airway management and monitoring equipment in lieu of the 12 hour course required by subsection (f)(2). Proof shall be made available to the Division upon request;

4) The dental hygienist must maintain Basic Life Support for Healthcare Providers certification or its equivalent, which will be in addition to the required courses. Certification or its equivalent shall be completed by September 30, 2011.

g) Dental hygienists may administer local anesthetics under the following conditions:

1) The dental hygienist functions under the supervision of the dentist who remains in the facility.

2) The dental hygienist is responsible for obtaining proof of certification, indicating successful completion of a 32 hour course that contains 24 hours of lecture and 8 hours of clinical training relative to the administration of local anesthetics and submitting certification to the dentist. An individual who graduated from an approved dental hygiene program after January 1, 1999 that contained administration of local anesthetics in the curriculum shall not be required to complete the 32 hour course upon proof to the dentist of the required curriculum. Proof of completion of education shall be made available to the Division upon request. The required hours shall include both didactic and clinical components and be given by a continuing education sponsor approved pursuant to Section 1220.440 or a dental or a dental hygiene program approved by the Division pursuant to Section 1220.250. The course shall contain at a minimum the following topics:

A) Patient preevaluation, which includes dental and medical health history (e.g., drug interactions/anxiety/pain and a physical evaluation);
B) Pharmacology (e.g., drugs/types, vasoconstrictors, dosages, toxicity);
C) Recordkeeping;
D) Anatomy/Neuroanatomy/Physiology;
E) Armamentarium;
F) Techniques that include adjunctive use of topical anesthetics, mandibular block and infiltration;
G) Complications;
H) Post-operative instructions; and
I) Clinical experience that includes combining techniques for quadrant anesthesia and practical use of different techniques in all areas of oral cavity.

3) A dental hygienist who was licensed in another state and was authorized to administer local anesthesia in that jurisdiction will not be required to complete an additional course. Proof shall be submitted to the dentist and shall be made available to the Division upon request.

h) The licensed dentist need not be present in the facility for a dental hygienist to perform the procedures set forth in this Section (except for the administration and monitoring of nitrous oxide, minimal sedation (anxiolysis), assisting in the provision of moderate sedation (conscious sedation), deep sedation, and general anesthesia, as defined in Section 1220.500, and the administration of injectable local anesthetics, which must be done under the direct supervision of a dentist as outlined in subsection (e)(1)) on persons who reside in a long-term care facility licensed by the State of Illinois or a mental health or developmental disability facility operated by the Department of Human Services hospital or other similar institution and are unable to travel to a dental office because of illness or infirmity. The dentist shall personally examine and diagnose the patient and determine which services are necessary to be performed, which shall be contained in a written order to the hygienist. The order must be implemented within 90 days after its issuance and an updated medical history and oral inspection must be performed by the hygienist immediately prior to beginning the procedures to ensure that the patient's health has not changed in any manner to warrant a re-examination by the dentist.

i) All intraoral procedures performed by a dental auxiliary, except those provided for in subsections (b) and (h), must be examined by the supervising dentist prior to the dismissal of the patient from the facility that day.
Dental Hygienist Job Overview | Best Jobs | US News Careers

Best Jobs > On Careers

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Dental Hygienist

Job Profile

Overview
Salary
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Job Listings

Clinical Laboratory Technician
Clinical Social Worker
Dental Assistant
Dentist
Diagnostic Medical Sonographer
Dietitian and Nutritionist
Epidemiologist
Esthetician
Home Health Aide
Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurse
Marriage and Family Therapist
Massage Therapist
Medical Assistant
Medical Equipment Repairer
Medical Secretary
Mental Health Counselor
Nurse Practitioner
Nursing Aide

Show Jobs Near: [ ] 

Find Jobs

Think of a dental hygienist as an insurance agent. "You see dentists when you have a problem," says Kell Swanson Jaecks, president of the American Dental Hygienists Association. "But you see dental hygienists for preventative health care."

The majority of the 183,000-plus registered dental hygienists work in dental offices alongside dentists. They will usually see a patient first and clean the patient’s teeth, removing tartar, stains and plaque as they brush, floss and scrape. Dental hygienists are also involved in educating patients on the best ways to brush and floss teeth, as well as which products to use. Along with their technical skills, dental hygienists should be excellent communicators. "The client’s head is in their lap basically," Swanson Jaecks says. "They should know how to read a client and relate to a client." She also says good hand-eye coordination is a must, as are critical-thinking skills, since dental hygienists are on the front lines of assessing a client’s oral health.

The job market for dental hygienists is booming. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the occupation will grow 33.3 percent by 2022, which is much faster than the average growth rate for most professions. This swell in jobs is likely due to the increased awareness among consumers of how oral health is linked to their
overall health. "More and more dental hygienists will be hired to do this preventative health care," but Swanson Jaecks says that physicians’ offices, emergency rooms and medical clinics are increasingly hiring dental hygienists to provide their patients with more holistic health care. These professionals can also be hired in academia and in research.

Salary

Hygienists make comfortable salaries, especially considering that more than half of them work part time. In 2013, their median salary was $71,110. The best-paid earned about $96,600, and the bottom 10 percent earned $47,880. Many of the top-paid hygienists work in dental offices, but ambulatory health care services also pay well. The state of California tends to compensate their dental hygienists particularly well, especially in the metropolitan areas of San Francisco, Vallejo, Santa Rosa, Santa Cruz and Los Angeles.

Salary Range

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentile</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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<tr>
<td>75th</td>
<td>$85,310</td>
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<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>$71,110</td>
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<tr>
<td>25th</td>
<td>$59,600</td>
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- See Full Salary Data
- See Dental Hygienist Jobs Near You

Training

According to the American Dental Hygienists Association, there are more than 330 dental hygiene programs offered in the U.S. Most hygienists have at least an associate degree, but some get bachelor’s degrees in dental hygiene – and even master’s degrees to further their careers. To practice, dental hygienists also have to obtain a state-specific license. Although the requirements vary state-to-state, most require graduation from an accredited program and the completion of a written and practical exam.

Many of the courses you take in a dental hygiene program will be applicable for a dental program, and the training and experience could help when sitting for the Dental Acceptance Test to gain admission to dental school. But working as a dental hygienist isn’t a shortcut to becoming a dentist. Hygienists who choose to pursue a D.D.S will still have the same length of study plus years of residency, even if they have a professional background in dentistry.

Reviews and Advice

Swanson Jaecks recommends getting involved with a networking association like the ADHA. "That is how I found all of the jobs in my career," she says. You can get involved with the association at a local, state and national level, and which all provide helpful career resource. When you get an interview, you should highlight your core knowledge of technical skills, as well as your soft skills – such as a good work ethic, positive attitude, problem-solving skills and strong communication skills. These will benefit someone hoping to snatch up a position.
Best Health Care Jobs

Dental Hygienist: Salary

Salary Outlook

Hygienists make comfortable salaries, especially considering that more than half of them work part time. In 2013, their median salary was $71,110. The best-paid earned about $96,690, and the bottom 10 percent earned $47,880. Many of the top-paid hygienists work in dental offices, but ambulatory health care services also pay well. The state of California tends to compensate their dental hygienists particularly well, especially in the metropolitan areas of San Francisco, Vallejo, Santa Rosa, Santa Cruz and Los Angeles.

200420052006200720082009201020112012$55,000$60,000$65,000$70,000$75,000

Mean Salaries Shown

Read more on salaries and benefits here.

Average Dental Hygienist Pay vs. Other Best Jobs

With an average salary of $71,530 in 2013, dental hygienists earn salaries that compare well to other health care jobs. However, dental assistants ($35,640) and clinical laboratory technicians ($40,240) generally make about half as much money. Registered nurses, who earned an average of $68,010 in 2013, made pay similar to dental hygienists. An occupational therapist ($77,890) tends to make slightly more money. And dentists, who often work closely with hygienists, earned $164,870.

$0$40,000$50,000$60,000$70,000$80,000$90,000$100,000$110,000$120,000$130,000$140,000$150,000$160,000$170,000

(Source: Amended at 34 Ill. Reg. 7205, effective May 5, 2010)
Dental Hygienists

Summary

Dental hygienists examine patients' teeth and gums and record the presence of diseases or abnormalities.

<table>
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<th>Quick Facts: Dental Hygienists</th>
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<td><strong>Entry-Level Education</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Work Experience in a Related Occupation</strong></td>
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<td><strong>On the Job Training</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Number of Jobs, 2020</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Job Outlook, 2020-20</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Employment Change, 2010-20</strong></td>
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What Dental Hygienists Do

Dental hygienists clean teeth, examine patients for signs of oral diseases such as gingivitis, and provide other preventative dental care. They also educate patients on ways to improve and maintain good oral health.

Work Environment

Almost all dental hygienists work in dentists' offices, which are clean and well lit. More than half of dental hygienists work part time.

How to Become a Dental Hygienist

Dental hygienists typically need an associate's degree in dental hygiene. All states require dental hygienists to be licensed; requirements vary by state.

Pay

The median annual wage for dental hygienists was $40,510 in May 2020.

Job Outlook

Employment of dental hygienists is projected to grow 39 percent from 2020 to 2030, much faster than the average for all occupations. Ongoing research linking oral health to general health will continue to spur demand for preventative dental services, which are often provided by dental hygienists.

Similar Occupations

Compare the job duties, education, job growth, and pay of dental hygienists with similar occupations.

More Information, including links to O*NET

Learn more about dental hygienists by visiting additional resources, including O*NET, a source on key characteristics of workers and occupations.
Duties
Dental hygienists typically do the following:
- Remove tartar, stains, and plaque from teeth.
- Apply sealants and fluoride to help protect teeth.
- Take and develop dental X-rays.
- Keep track of patient care and treatment plans.
- Teach patients oral hygiene techniques, such as how to brush and floss correctly.

Dental hygienists use many types of tools to do their job. They clean and polish teeth with hand, power, and ultrasonic tools. In some cases, they communicate with an air polishing device, which sprays a combination of air, water, and bulb dust. They polish teeth with a powered tool that works like a small electric toothbrush. Hygienists use x-ray machines to take pictures to check for tooth decay problems.

Dental hygienists help patients develop and maintain good oral health. For example, they may explain the relationship between diet and oral health. They may also give advice to patients on how to select toothbrushes and other oral care devices.

Other tasks hygienists may perform vary by state. Some states allow hygienists to place and carve filling materials, temporary fillings, and periodontal dressings.

Work Environment
Dental hygienists hold about 118,400 jobs in 2018. Almost all dental hygienists work in dentists' offices. They work closely with dentists and dental assistants.

Dental hygienists wear safety glasses, surgical masks, and gloves to protect themselves and patients from infectious diseases. When taking X-rays, they follow strict procedures to protect themselves and patients. They may spend long periods bending over to work on patients.

Work Schedules
More than half of dental hygienists worked part time in 2018. Dentists often hire hygienists to work only a few days a week, so some hygienists work for more than one dentist.

How to Become a Dental Hygienist
Dental hygienists typically need an associate's degree in dental hygiene. All states require dental hygienists to be licensed, requirements vary by state.

Education
Dental hygienists typically need an associate's degree in dental hygiene. Bachelor's degrees in dental hygiene are also available, but are less common. A bachelor's or master's degree is usually required for research, teaching, or clinical practice in public or school health programs.

High school students interested in becoming dental hygienists should take courses in biology, chemistry, and mathematics. Some dental hygiene programs also require applicants to have completed at least 1 year of college, specific course requirements vary by school.

Most schools offer laboratory, clinical, and classroom instruction. Hygienists study anatomy, physiology, nutrition, radiography, and periodontology, which is the study of gum disease.

Important Qualities
Compassion. Sometimes patients are in extreme pain or have fears about undergoing dental work, and the hygienist must be sensitive to their emotions.

Dental Hygiene
Dental hygienists must follow specific rules and procedures to help detect and diagnose periodontal disease.

Patience. Dental hygienists must be good at working with their hands. They generally work in tight quarters on a small part of the body, using very precise tools and instruments.

Interpersonal skills. Dental hygienists must work closely with dentists and patients.

Physical stamina. Dental hygienists should be comfortable performing physical tasks, such as bending over patients for a long time.

License, Certifications, and Registrations
Every state requires dental hygienists to be licensed, requirements vary by state. In most states, a degree from an accredited dental hygiene program and passing grades on written and practical examinations are required for licenses. For specific application requirements, contact your state's dental or health board.
Pay

The median annual wage for dental hygienists was $70,340 in May 2012. The median wage is the wage at which half the workers in an occupation earned more than that amount and half earned less. The lowest 10 percent earned less than $48,560, and the top 10 percent earned more than $96,340.

Some dental hygienists receive benefits, such as vacation, sick leave, and contributions to their retirement fund. However, benefits vary by employer and may be available only to full-time workers.

More than half of dental hygienists worked part-time in 2012.

Job Outlook

Employment of dental hygienists is projected to grow 33 percent from 2012 to 2022, much faster than the average for all occupations. Ongoing research linking oral health and general health will continue to spur the demand for preventative dental services, which are often provided by dental hygienists.

Employment projections data for Dental Hygienists, 2012-22

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DENTAL TEAM CAREERS: DENTAL HYGIENIST

If you like helping people, enjoy working with your hands as well as your mind, and are interested in helping to prevent disease while assisting patients to maintain their health, a career as a dental hygienist may be for you. Dental hygiene offers women and men of all ages, races and ethnic backgrounds exceptional career opportunities.

- **Job Description**
- **Career Advantages**
- **Opportunities**
- **Education/Training & Admission Requirements**
- **Accreditation**
- **Examination and Licensure**
- **Earning Potential**
- **Dental Hygiene Career Video**
- **Additional Resources**
- **Fact Sheet** | PDF file/56k

**Job Description**

A career as a dental hygienist offers a wide range of challenges. In the dental office, the dentist and the dental hygienist work together to meet the oral health needs of patients. Since each state has its own specific regulations regarding their responsibilities, the range of services performed by hygienists varies from state to state. Some of the services provided by dental hygienists may include:

- patient screening procedures; such as assessment of oral health conditions, review of the health history, oral cancer screening, head and neck inspection, dental charting and taking blood pressure and pulse
- taking and developing dental radiographs (x-rays)
- removing calculus and plaque (hard and soft deposits) from all
surfaces of the teeth
- applying preventive materials to the teeth (e.g., sealants and fluorides)
- teaching patients appropriate oral hygiene strategies to maintain oral health;
  (e.g., tooth brushing, flossing and nutritional counseling)
- counseling patients about good nutrition and its impact on oral health
- making impressions of patients' teeth for study casts (models of teeth used by dentists to evaluate patient treatment needs)
- performing documentation and office management activities

Career Advantages

Dental hygiene offers the following challenges and rewards:

Personal satisfaction: One of the most enjoyable aspects of a career in dental hygiene is working with people. Personal fulfillment comes from providing a valuable health care service while establishing trusting relationships with patients.

Prestige: As a result of their education and clinical training in a highly skilled discipline, dental hygienists are respected as valued members of the oral health care team.

Variety: Dental hygienists use a variety of interpersonal and clinical skills to meet the oral health needs of many different patients each day. Hygienists have opportunities to help special population groups such as children, the elderly and the disabled. They may also provide oral health instruction in primary and secondary schools and other settings.

Creativity: Because dental hygienists interact with such diverse population groups, they must be creative in their approach to patient management and oral health education.

Flexibility: The flexibility offered by full- and part-time employment options and availability of evening and weekend hours enable dental hygienists to balance their career and lifestyle needs. Hygienists also have opportunities to work in a wide variety of settings including private dental practices, educational and community institutions, research teams and dental corporations.

Security: The services that dental hygienists provide are needed and valued by a large percentage of the population. There is currently a great demand for dental hygienists. Employment opportunities will be excellent well into the future. Due to the success of preventive dentistry in reducing the incidence of oral disease, the expanding older population will retain their teeth longer, and will be even more aware of the
importance of regular dental care. With the emphasis on preventive care, dentists will need to employ more dental hygienists than ever before to meet the increased demand for dental services.

Opportunities

Hygienists are in demand in general dental practices and in specialty practices such as periodontics or pediatric dentistry. They also may be employed to provide dental hygiene services for patients in hospitals, nursing homes and public health clinics.

Depending upon the level of education and experience achieved, dental hygienists can apply their skills and knowledge to other career activities such as teaching hygiene students in dental schools and dental hygiene education programs. Research, office management and business administration are other career options. Employment opportunities also may be available with companies that market dental-related materials and equipment.

Education/Training & Admission Requirements

Dental hygienists receive their education through academic programs at community colleges, technical colleges, dental schools or universities. The majority of community college programs take at least two years to complete, with graduates receiving associate degrees. Receipt of this degree allows a hygienist to take licensure examinations (national and state or regional), become licensed and to work in a dental office.

University-based dental hygiene programs may offer baccalaureate and master's degrees, which generally require at least two years of further schooling. These additional degrees may be required for a career in teaching and/or research, as well as for clinical practice in school or public health programs.

Dental hygiene program admission requirements vary depending upon the specific school. High school-level courses such as health, biology, psychology, chemistry, mathematics and speech will be beneficial in a dental hygiene career. Most programs show a preference for individuals who have completed at least one year of college. Some baccalaureate degree programs require that applicants complete two years of college prior to enrollment in the dental hygiene program. Contact the particular dental hygiene program of interest to you for specific program requirements.

Dental hygiene education programs offer clinical education in the form of supervised patient care experiences. Additionally, these programs include courses in liberal arts (e.g., English, speech, sociology and psychology); basic sciences (e.g., anatomy, physiology, pharmacology, immunology, chemistry, microbiology and pathology); and clinical sciences (e.g., dental hygiene, radiology and dental materials). After
completion of a dental hygiene program, dental hygienists can choose to pursue additional training in such areas as education, business administration, basic sciences, marketing and public health.

Accreditation

The Commission on Dental Accreditation of the American Dental Association is responsible for accrediting dental hygiene education programs. There are approximately 270 commission-accredited dental hygiene programs in the United States.

Examination and Licensure

Dental hygienists are licensed by each state to provide dental hygiene care and patient education. Almost all states require that dental hygienists be graduates of commission-accredited dental hygiene education programs to be eligible for state licensure. And, almost all states require candidates for licensure to obtain a passing score on the National Board Dental Hygiene Examination (a comprehensive written examination) in addition to passing the state-authorized licensure examination. The state or regional examination tests candidates’ clinical dental hygiene skills as well as their knowledge of dental hygiene and related subjects.

Upon receipt of their license, dental hygienists may use "R.D.H." after their names to signify recognition by the state that they are a Registered Dental Hygienist.

Earning Potential

The salary of a dental hygienist depends primarily upon the responsibilities associated with the specific position, the geographic location of employment and the type of practice or other setting in which the hygienist works. Hygienists earn salaries equal to other health care personnel with similar educational backgrounds and experience.

Dental Hygiene Career Video

Prestige, respect, creativity, personal satisfaction and flexibility are career traits emphasized in this 10-minute career video. This is a fast-paced story that includes other information such as job responsibilities, training and career opportunities.

The full length video can be ordered via the Something to Smile About order form.

Video (2 min. excerpt)

- Broadband/10.3MB
Additional Resources

Contact your dentist, dental hygienist or the local dental society component of the American Dental Association in your area. Perhaps you can arrange for a brief visit to a dental office to observe a dental hygienist at work. You also can contact an accredited dental hygiene program and arrange to talk with a counselor and visit the school.

For a list of accredited Dental Hygiene programs contact:

Commission on Dental Accreditation
211 E. Chicago Avenue, Chicago, IL 60611
312-440-2718
E-mail: education@ada.org

American Dental Hygienists' Association (ADHA)
444 North Michigan Avenue
Suite 3400
Chicago, IL 60611-3902
312-440-8900
Fax: 312-440-8929
http://www.adha.org

American Dental Education Association (ADEA)
1625 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20036-2212
202-667-9433
Fax: 202-667-0642
http://www.adea.org
Occupation: Dental Hygienist
Agency: IDFPR - Division of Professional Regulation
Phone: 217.782.8556
URL: www.idfpr.com
Job Description: An individual who, under the supervision of a dentist, is engaged in helping people prevent tooth decay and gum disease and maintain oral health. The person examines teeth and gums, cleans deposits and stains from teeth, and treats teeth with fluorides and other decay preventive agents. A dental hygienist takes impressions of teeth and removes sutures, temporary crowns, and restorations. They also take and develop X-rays and perform dental health education functions.
Type of Regulation: License
Number Regulated: 7,788
Age: No requirement
Education/Experience: High school graduate or its equivalent; Certification of successful completion of two (2) academic years of credit from a dental hygiene program approved by the Commission on Dental Accreditation of the American Dental Association; Current valid certification in cardiopulmonary resuscitation.
Exam: Two examinations are required: National Dental Hygiene Examination. Administered by the American Dental Association; 211 East Chicago Avenue; Chicago, Illinois 60611-2678.
Exam Type: Written and/or clinical
Exam Administered: March/April, July, December
Exam Fee: Refer to testing entities
Passing Criteria: The passing score accepted by the Division shall be the passing score established by the testing entity. a. Northeast Regional Board (NERB) Examination in Dental Hygiene within the past five years. Exam given by the Northeast Regional Board of Dental Exam
Repeats: Retake requirements shall be that of the testing entity.
Continuing Education: 36 credit hours and current CPR certification
Citizenship: Other: Must be of good moral character
Note: Licensure requirements, licensure fees, examination fees and exam administration are subject to change.
Application Fee: $100.00 by examination; $100.00 by endorsement
Renewal Fee: $20.00 plus all lapsed renewal fees not to exceed $85.00
Reinstatement Fee: Three years
License Period: Yes. Have been licensed by exam and engaged in lawful practice of dental hygiene for three (3) of the last five (5) years; Must be of good moral character; Must meet all of the Illinois requirements in education and training; Must submit proof of current val
Reciprocity/Endorsement:
Dental Hygienists

Also called: Dental Hygienists, Dental Hygienist, Medical Assistant, Hygienist, Registered Dental Hygienist (RDH)

What they do:
Clean teeth and examine oral areas, head, and neck for signs of oral disease. May educate patients on oral hygiene, take and develop X-rays, or apply fluoride or sealants.

On the job, you would:
• Clean calcareous deposits, acrations, and stains from teeth and beneath margins of gums, using dental instruments.
• Record and review patient medical histories.
• Operate periodontal and other dental instruments.
• Locate periodontal recesses of gums and signs of gum disease.

KNOWLEDGE

Health
• Implications and technique

Business
• Customer service
• Sales and marketing

Arts and Humanities
• English language

Math and Science
• Psychology

SKILLS

Basic Skills
• Talking to others
• Listening to others, not interrupting, and taking good questions

Social
• Seeking for ways to help people
• Understanding people’s needs

ABILITIES

Verbal
• Communicate by speaking
• Listen and understand what people say

Hand and Finger Use
• Put together small parts with your fingers
• Keep your arm or hand steady

Attention
• Pay attention to something without being distracted
• Do two or more things at the same time

Ideas and Logic
• Notice when problems happen

PERSONALITY

People interested in this work like activities that include helping people, teaching, and talking.

They do well at jobs that need:
• Dependability
• Attention to Detail
• Concern for Others

• Integrity
• Cooperation
• Self Control

TECHNOLOGY

You might use software like this on the job:

Medical software
• Dental scheduling software
• Medical office management software

Electronic mail software
• Email software

Accounting software
• Dental billing software

EDUCATION

Associate’s degree or bachelor’s degree

Get started on your career:

Find Training
Get Certifications

JOB OUTLOOK

New job opportunities are very likely in the future.

SALARY:
$71,110 per year, on average

Check-out Jobs
Find Jobs

EXPLORE MORE

• Auditing & Bookkeeping
• Dental Hygienists
• Dental Hygiene Technicians
• Dental Assistants
• Physical Therapist Assistants
• Radiation Therapists

You might like a career in one of these industries:

• Health & Counseling

See more details at O*NET Online about dental hygienists.
DENTAL HYGIENE–The American Dental Hygienists’ Association

- Career Profile
- Employment
- Education
- Outlook

Career Profile -- What does a dental hygienist do?
- Performs patient screening procedures
- Teaches patients how to practice good oral hygiene
- Applies preventive materials such as fluorides and sealants to the teeth
- Counsels patients regarding good nutrition and its impact on oral health
- Removes calculus and plaque (hard and soft deposits) from the teeth

Employment -- Where do dental hygienists work?
- Dental offices of general dentists and dental specialists
- Public health agencies, hospitals and community health clinics
- Public school systems, dental schools and dental hygiene education programs
- Dental equipment and product sales and research

Education -- How much training is needed?
- Most training programs take at least 2 years to complete with graduates receiving associate degrees
- High school classes in mathematics, chemistry, biology, and English are often recommended
- There are approximately 287 ADA accredited dental hygiene education programs in community colleges, technical colleges, dental schools & universities in U.S.
- Other innovative training methods include electronic distance education & institutional based didactic coursework combined with in-office clinical training

Outlook -- What are future opportunities?
- Projected to be one of the 30 fastest growing occupations
- Flexible work schedules are often available in this high demand field
- Dental hygiene offers excellent career opportunities for nontraditional students (including individuals who are over 23 years of age, those seeking a career change or reentry and individuals from culturally diverse backgrounds)
- Compensation depends on responsibilities, geographic location and other factors

For additional information about careers in dental hygiene
- The American Dental Association – (312) 440-2390 or skoogb@ada.org
  (Call or write for the brochure, “Dental Hygiene-Word of Mouth-Careers in the Dental Profession”)

- The American Dental Hygienists’ Association – (312) 440-8900, www.adha.org