





PRESTIGE

*“It’s very rewarding to be able*

VARIETY

*to have a positive influence on*

CREATIVITY

*others and help them achieve oral*

FLEXIBILITY

*health. It’s a pleasure to be part*

SECURITY

*of a respected dental team.”*

CHALLENGES

RESPECT

## Introduction

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 hygienists are important members of the dental health care team who work with dentists in the delivery of dental care to patients. Hygienists use their knowledge and clinical skills to provide dental hygiene care for patients. They use their interpersonal skills to motivate and instruct patients on methods to prevent oral disease and to maintain oral health.

Dental hygiene offers women and men of all ages, races and ethnic backgrounds exceptional career opportunities. A minimum of two years of college education that combines classroom and clinical coursework is necessary to become a dental hygienist. This education prepares graduates to provide care to patients in dental offices, clinics and educational or health care institutions. Studying in an accredited program provides education that is based on the latest procedures and techniques.

*Dental hygienists are a valuable asset in a dental practice. In addition to performing technical duties, they play an important role in teaching patients appropriate oral hygiene techniques and counseling them regarding good nutrition and its impact on oral health.*

## *What do Dental Hygienists do?*

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 regarding 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); and
- performing documentation and office management activities.

Since each state has its own specific regulations regarding the dental hygienist's responsibilities, the range of services provided by a dental hygienist varies from state to state. Responsibilities generally include removing deposits from teeth and providing oral health education.



PRESTIGE

*“As a dental hygienist, I stress*

VARIETY

*prevention to my patients every day.*

CREATIVITY

*We have the ability to help prevent*

FLEXIBILITY

*oral diseases. That’s remarkable!”*

SECURITY

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## *What are the advantages of a Dental Hygiene career?*

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, as well as the availability of evening and weekend hours, enables 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 next century. 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.

Practice patterns also influence employment opportunities for hygienists. With the current trend toward group practice and practice styles that stress effective and productive use of office personnel, job opportunities will continue to increase.

## *Where do Dental Hygienists work?*

There are many employment opportunities in the field of dental hygiene, since many dentists employ one or more dental hygienists.

Hygienists are in demand in general dental practices, as well as in specialty practices such as periodontics or pediatric dentistry.

Dental hygienists are responsible for some important patient care services provided in a dental office, including removing calculus, stains and plaque from teeth, applying fluoride and pit and fissure sealants, taking and developing dental radiographs (x-rays), providing oral hygiene instructions (e.g., brushing, flossing and nutritional counseling).

Hygienists may also 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 also 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. Additionally, employment opportunities may be available with companies that market dental-related materials and equipment.

## *What education does a Dental Hygienist need?*

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 to embark on 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. Counselors, advisors and prospective students should contact the particular dental hygiene program of interest for specific program requirements.

Dental hygiene education programs provide students with 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 agency responsible for accrediting dental hygiene education programs and deciding whether or not they meet the standards for accreditation is the Commission on Dental Accreditation of the American Dental Association. There are approximately 270 Commission-accredited dental hygiene programs in the United States.



PRESTIGE

*“As a parent, I like the flexibility*

VARIETY

*of being able to combine a career*

CREATIVITY

*and family.”*

FLEXIBILITY

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## *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. Additionally, 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*.

## *What is a Dental Hygienist's 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 hygienists are considered an integral part of the dental team providing educational and preventive services to ensure delivery of long-term oral health.*

## *Where can I get more information?*

Contact your dentist, dental hygienist or the local dental society 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 can also 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 throughout the country, please contact:

The Commission on Dental Accreditation  
211 E. Chicago Avenue  
Chicago, IL 60611  
TEL: 312.440.2718

The list can also be found through ADA ONLINE, the ADA'S Website, at <http://www.ada.org>

*A dental hygienist takes on significant responsibility in the delivery of oral health care and is a valuable member of the dental care team. Many dentists have one or more hygienists on staff, so dental hygienists are in demand. As a result, the job outlook is excellent.*

American Dental Hygienists' Association  
(ADHA)

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TEL: 312.440.8900

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WEBSITE: [www.adha.org](http://www.adha.org)

(The ADHA is the national professional organization for dental hygienists.)

American Dental Education Association  
(ADEA)

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(The ADEA is an organization that promotes the advancement of dental education, research and service in all institutions that offer accredited programs for dental personnel.)

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