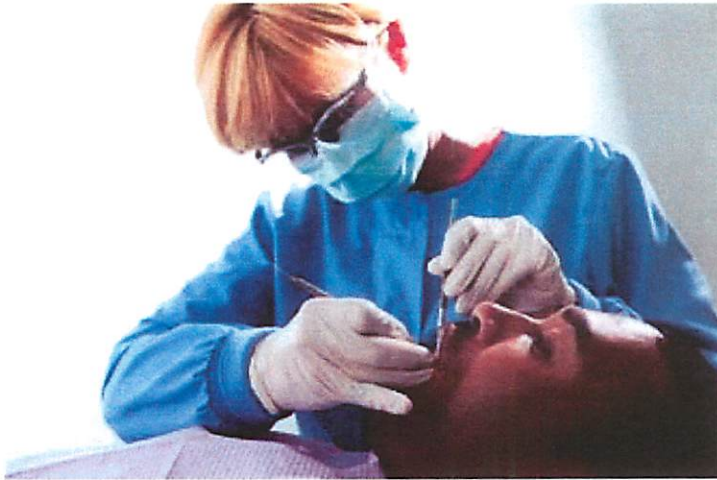




U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Dental Hygienists

Summary



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

Quick Facts: Dental Hygienists

2012 Median Pay	\$70,210 per year \$33.75 per hour
Entry-Level Education	Associate's degree
Work Experience in a Related Occupation	None
On-the-job Training	None
Number of Jobs, 2012	192,800
Job Outlook, 2012-22	33% (Much faster than average)
Employment Change, 2012-22	64,200

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 \$70,210 in May 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 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.

What Dental Hygienists Do



Dental hygienists wear safety glasses, surgical masks, and gloves to protect themselves and their patients from diseases.

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.

Duties

Dental hygienists typically do the following:

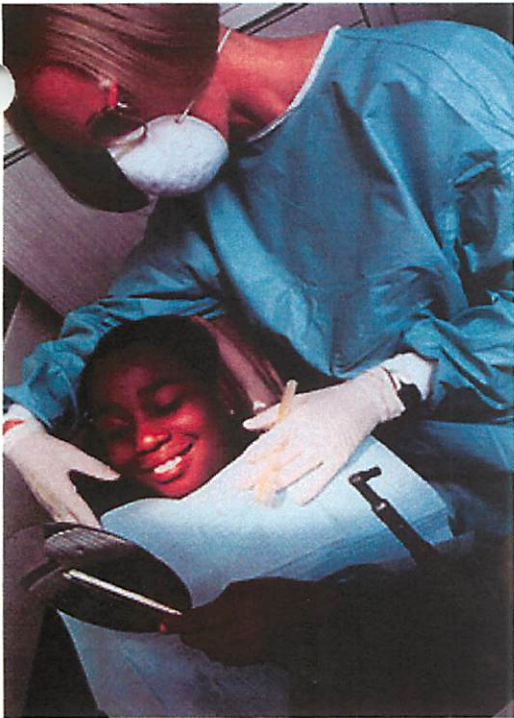
- Remove tartar, stains, and plaque from teeth
- Apply sealants and fluorides to help protect teeth
- Take and develop dental x rays
- Keep track of patient care and treatment plans
- Teach patients oral hygiene techniques, such as how to brush and floss correctly

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 remove stains with an air-polishing device, which sprays a combination of air, water, and baking soda. They polish teeth with a powered tool that works like an automatic toothbrush. Hygienists use x ray machines to take pictures to check for tooth or jaw 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 discuss diet and other topics that affect a patient's dental health.

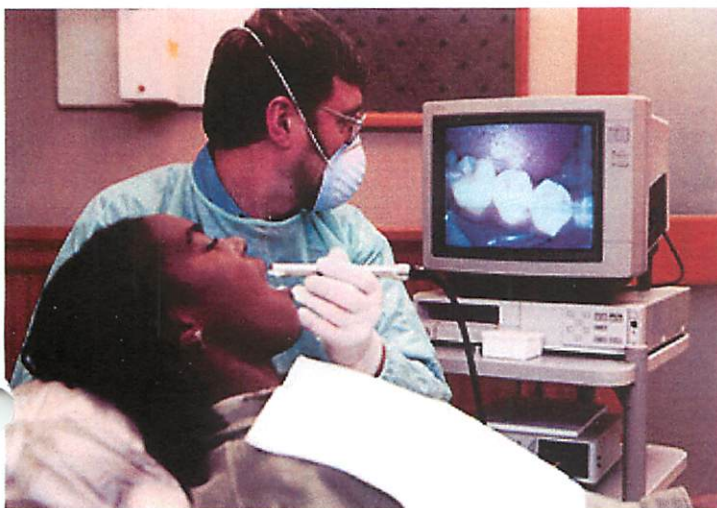
Dental hygienists held about 192,800 jobs in 2012. Almost all dental hygienists work in dentists' offices. They work closely with [dentists](#) and [dental assistants](#).

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 2012. 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 remove soft and hard deposits from teeth and advise patients on how to practice good oral hygiene.

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 entrance 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.

Detail oriented. Dental hygienists must follow specific rules and protocols to help dentists diagnose and treat a patient. In rare cases, dental hygienists work without the direct supervision of a dentist.

Dexterity. 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.

Licenses, 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 licensure. For specific application requirements, contact your state's medical or health board.

Pay

Dental Hygienists

Median annual wages, May 2012

Dental hygienists

\$70,210

Health technologists and technicians

\$40,380

Total, all occupations

\$34,750

Note: All Occupations includes all occupations in the U.S. Economy.
 Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment Statistics

The median annual wage for dental hygienists was \$70,210 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 \$46,540, and the top 10 percent earned more than \$96,280.

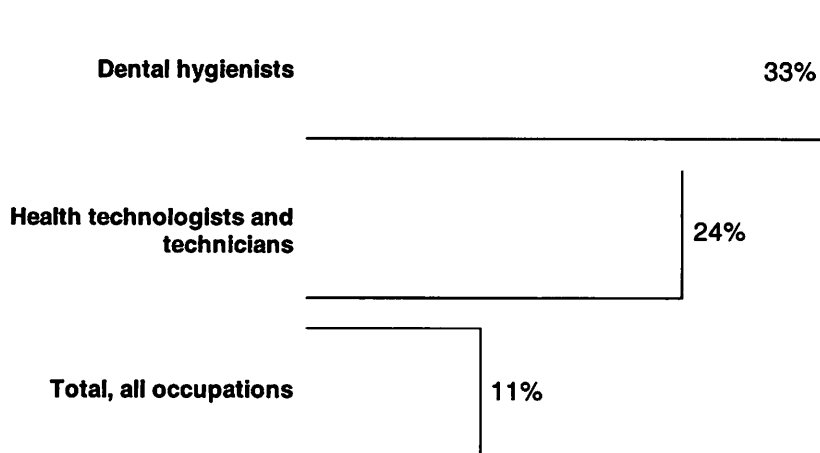
Some dental hygienists receive benefits, such as vacation, sick leave, and contributions to their retirement fund. However, benefits vary by employer and may be available only to full-time workers.

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

Job Outlook

Dental Hygienists

Percent change in employment, projected 2012-22



Note: All Occupations includes all occupations in the U.S. Economy.
 Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Projections program

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.

As their practices expand, dentists will hire more hygienists to perform routine dental care, allowing the dentist to see more patients. In addition, as the large baby-boom population ages and people keep more of their original teeth than previous generations did, the need to maintain and treat these teeth will continue to drive demand for dental care.

Federal health legislation is expected to expand the number of patients who have access to health insurance. People with new or expanded dental insurance coverage will be more likely to visit a dentist than in the past. As a result, the demand for all dental services, including those performed by hygienists, will increase.

Employment projections data for Dental Hygienists, 2012-22

Occupational	SOC	Employment,	Projected Employment,	Change, 2012-22	Employment by
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Title	Code	2012	2022	Percent	Numeric	Industry
Dental hygienists	29-2021	192,800	256,900	33	64,200	[XLS]

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Projections program

Similar Occupations

This table shows a list of occupations with job duties that are similar to those of dental hygienists.

	OCCUPATION	JOB DUTIES	ENTRY-LEVEL EDUCATION	2012 MEDIAN PAY
	Dental Assistants	Dental assistants have many tasks, ranging from providing patient care and taking x rays to recordkeeping and scheduling appointments. Their duties vary by state and by the dentists' offices where they work.	Postsecondary non-degree award	\$34,500
	Medical Assistants	Medical assistants complete administrative and clinical tasks in the offices of physicians, podiatrists, chiropractors, and other health practitioners. Their duties vary with the location, specialty, and size of the practice.	Postsecondary non-degree award	\$29,370
	Occupational Therapy Assistants and Aides	Occupational therapy assistants and aides help patients develop, recover, and improve the skills needed for daily living and working. Occupational therapy assistants are directly involved in providing therapy to patients, while occupational therapy aides typically perform support activities. Both assistants and aides work under the direction of occupational therapists.	See How to Become One	\$48,940



Physical Therapist Assistants and Aides

Physical therapist assistants (sometimes called PTAs) and physical therapist aides work under the direction and supervision of physical therapists. They help patients who are recovering from injuries and illnesses regain movement and manage pain.

[See How to Become One](#)

\$39,430



Physician Assistants

Physician assistants, also known as PAs, practice medicine on a team under the supervision of physicians and surgeons. They are formally educated to examine patients, diagnose injuries and illnesses, and provide treatment.

Master's degree

\$90,930



Registered Nurses

Registered nurses (RNs) provide and coordinate patient care, educate patients and the public about various health conditions, and provide advice and emotional support to patients and their family members.

Associate's degree

\$65,470



Radiation Therapists

Radiation therapists treat cancer and other diseases in patients by administering radiation treatments.

Associate's degree

\$77,560

Contacts for More Information

For information about educational requirements and available accredited programs for dental hygienists, visit [American Dental Hygienists' Association](#)

For information about accredited programs and educational requirements, visit

[Commission on Dental Accreditation, American Dental Association](#)

The State Board of Dental Examiners in each state can provide information on licensing requirements.

O*NET

[Dental Hygienists](#)

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U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics | Office of Occupational Statistics and Employment Projections, PSB Suite 2135, 2
Massachusetts Avenue, NE Washington, DC 20212-0001
www.bls.gov/ooh | Telephone: 1-202-691-5700 | [Contact OOH](#)