

Registered dental hygienists – *your partners in oral health*

Your mouth is in good hands

Clean, healthy teeth and gums make you feel better both inside and out. It all starts with good oral hygiene – and dental hygienists who care about your oral health, take the time to get to know you and explain the different procedures for treatment. Dental hygienists are recognized and respected for their knowledge, expertise, ethics and commitment to the prevention of oral diseases – and for keeping your smile healthy.

A progressive profession

Ontario was the first province to recognize dental hygiene as a profession in 1947. Today, dental hygiene is practiced in more than 50 countries on six continents. Ontario boasts more than 13,000 registered dental hygienists, making it one of the largest healthcare professions in Ontario.

As regulated healthcare professionals, dental hygienists must follow stringent regulations and standards set by their regulatory college to ensure the public receives safe and ongoing comprehensive oral care.

The provincial government recognizes dental hygiene as a major contributor and partner in Ontario's health-care system. A forward-thinking profession, dental hygiene is considered a leader and integral part of the government's approach to the delivery of oral health-care services.

Access to dental hygiene services

Members of the public can decide where to receive oral health care and who is best able to provide this service.

Dental hygienists work in a variety of public and private health-care settings, where quality of service and quality of life for clients and the public rank among their highest priorities.

Independent dental hygiene clinics and mobile practices improve public access to preventive oral health care at an affordable cost. This is particularly



beneficial for low-income families, the uninsured and those who have difficulty travelling to a dental office, including the sick, the homebound, and residents in long-term care homes.

Dental hygienists are also employed in public health, education, research, hospitals, and the dental supply industry as well as in traditional general dental offices.

Prevention is key

As important members of the oral healthcare team, dental hygienists have a distinctive clinical and educational role in preventing gum disease and tooth decay. Their primary concern is promoting good oral health.

To achieve this, dental hygienists not only scale (clean) teeth, they provide professional assessments, plan and implement treatments, evaluate individual oral health-care needs, and offer advice to help you attain and maintain optimum oral health care.

Expect more than just a cleaning

If you think you are just getting your teeth cleaned when you visit a dental hygienist, that's only part of the oral health-care process.

During your appointment, dental hygienists:

- Review your medical history to make sure there are no medical conditions that could influence treatment – if there are, they will take precautions and make appropriate referrals.
- Assess the condition of the head, neck, tongue, gums, teeth and other areas of the mouth – and refer you to a medical professional if anything unusual is detected, such as a sore or lesion that may indicate early stages of oral cancer.
- Measure the space between gums and teeth to help determine gum health.
- Develop and customize preventive home care program.
- Teach you the most effective way to brush and clean between teeth; offer advice on the purchase and use of oral care products.
- Provide information and advice on matters related to particular needs, such as nutrition, smoking cessation, dry mouth and bad breath.
- Scale (clean) teeth to remove plaque bacteria and hardened or calcified plaque build-up (tartar).
- Polish teeth to remove stains, if required, and apply a fluoride to strengthen them, if needed.

The link: mouth and body

Most people don't connect mouths to the rest of the body

There is a link. Gum or periodontal disease is one of the most common diseases in humans. It is an infectious condition that can result in the inflammatory destruction of gum tissue and bone. It can start with swollen and tender gums that bleed when flossing and brushing your teeth.

Bacteria from gum infection can enter the blood stream or airways, thereby increasing risk of heart disease, stroke and respiratory disorders. Gum infections can also make it difficult to control diabetes.

Dental hygienists work with you to help keep your mouth healthy, and, in so doing, they make an important contribution to your overall health.

Maintaining good oral health and overall health requires collaboration. Dental hygienists work with many health-care professionals, including physicians, periodontists, oral surgeons, pharmacists, dieticians, as well as dentists.

As professional health-care providers, dental hygienists are primarily concerned with promoting good oral health. Dental hygiene is among the largest of the regulated healthcare professions in the province. In Ontario all dental hygienists are registered with the College of Dental Hygienists of Ontario, which regulates the profession to ensure the public receives safe and ongoing comprehensive oral care.

Tips for a healthy mouth

Daily home care. Brush twice a day with a soft toothbrush for two minutes using fluoridated toothpaste. Floss or clean between teeth and scrape or brush your tongue once a day.

Toss toothbrush regularly. Bacteria, fungi and viruses can survive on toothbrushes. Replace every couple of months, when bristles no longer stand straight or after a cold or flu.

Watch acid intake. Too much acid in a diet can eventually weaken tooth enamel, causing sensitivity, unsightly appearance and possibly tooth loss. After eating or drinking acidic foods, rinse thoroughly with water or chew sugarless gum, which stimulates saliva flow and helps reduce acids causing tooth decay.

Smart snacking. Between-meal snacks, particularly sugary snacks and beverages should be avoided as they may contribute to tooth decay. Choose celery, carrots, apples or hard cheese, because the increased saliva flow from chewing has a natural cleansing action helping protect your teeth.



Get an early start. Good oral health should begin early – even before a child's first teeth erupt. Parents play an important role in a child's oral care. The first visit to a dental hygienist is recommended before a child turns one, and then regular visits should be scheduled.

Play it safe. Sport injuries often involve damage to the teeth. Always wear a mouthguard when engaging in rugged sports. To care for it, rinse well after each use, air dry and keep it in a storage case in a moderate temperature.

For more information on these and other oral health matters, talk to your dental hygienist and visit lovemyteeth.ca to learn more.