



Dental Hygienists Make Going to the Dentist Funs

Dental Hygienists are the dental equivalents of nursing assistants in a family practice; they handle the front&nash;line interactions between dental patients and routine care; when a patient comes in, they are often the first person the patient talks to.

As a result, [dental hygienist jobs](#) require an interesting mix of interpersonal and technical skills; they also have the flexibility of part-time work, and (at least compared to getting a doctorate of dentistry) have considerably relaxed schooling requirements and licensing regulations.

This is a growing field. As the American population ages, [dental hygiene jobs](#) are growing with the demographic shift; most people experience the bulk of their dental problems after the ages of 40 to 50, when wear and tear have taken the teeth past their designed utility cycle. [Dental hygienist jobs](#) are a variation on generalized [dental assisting jobs](#).

As with all medical jobs, this is one that offers a steady employment track record that is nearly recession-proof. It is also one where you have the benefit of working with people and making their lives significantly better; it will require lots of hours standing, and you will be pretty much tied to the hours the dental practice honors for taking in new clients and handling paperwork.

All that being said the primary duties needed for [dental hygienist jobs](#) are dental related. Cleaning and polishing teeth, giving patients instructions on good hygiene habits and oral care, and general patient education are the primary roles a dental hygienist takes on. This frees up the dentist for more-complex tasks and procedures requiring their particular education and expertise.

A dental assistant's job will encompass many (and probably all) of the following tasks over the course of a typical month: taking and processing X-rays; making molds for dental prosthetics ranging from bridges to full three-point crowns; suture removal; polishing fillings and dealing with other metal intrusions in the mouth, up to and including full restorations; record keeping ranging from basic patient data-entry requirements to recording prescriptions and looking for possible interactions between medications; and checking a patient's medical history.

All of these tasks require that a person in a dental hygienist's job needs a good chair-side manner and good interpersonal skills; people coming in for a dental visit are very rarely happy to be there; often times they are in significant pain. Sometimes, they are reticent to talk about their dental practices. For hygienists and assistants working in mallofacial and orthodontic clinics, acting to use the spreader, the vacuum pump or the UV-curing light are also tasks that may come up.

Most dental clinics keep hygienists on for part-time work. The traditional work role for a hygienist is to work part-time (often while going to school), or to work for multiple dentists, either in the same practice or in different ones. Many dental hygienists consider the short workweek to be a significant perk.

Dental hygienists can usually enter the profession after getting an associate's degree and getting proper licensure in the state where they wish to work. Typical salaries start in the range of \$16,000 a year or so for part-time work and it is not unusual for a dental hygienist to make upwards of \$40,000 if they can find full-time work. Some states have trade schools that will certify a dental hygienist after a GED or high school diploma and a year of course work in a dental hygiene program; there are hundreds of schools with dental hygienist programs.

For those who want to work beyond a dental clinic, becoming a dental hygienist for a public-service organization such as a school office or research facility, the career path includes a bachelor's degree and even a master's program for those who want to teach the skills to others in a classroom setting.

The licensing exam for a dental assistant's job is typically a written and then clinical examination. The American Dental Association Joint Commission on National Examinations administers the written exam; the local state board administers the clinical exam. A number of states will also require an additional examination on the legal aspects of the profession, and it is a good idea to study up on the insurance



Dental Career Feature

regulations and paper work for dental offices in the state you intend to work in.

Moving into a career as a dental hygienist can generate a substantial revenue increase, and it is a certification and exam program that can be done in two years. A significant number of dental hygienists move on to practice full dentistry; upwards of 20 percent of them eventually move into higher education and get a full DDS (Doctor of Dental Science) degree, becoming full-time practicing dentists. Dentists, more so than general physicians, promote from within; it is not

quite the separated career path that nursing and becoming an MD has developed into.

Consider going into a dental assistant's job if you enjoy working with people and want to materially and substantially improve their lives by making them feel better about themselves and their physical appearance, by reducing pain, and by otherwise having a positive impact on their lives. It also makes an excellent stepping stone for a career going deeper into the field of dentistry.

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