



## Dental Career Feature

### Dental Nurses and Hygienists

**Dental nursing jobs (also known as dental hygienist jobs) offer a variety of dental job opportunities. If you are looking for healthcare jobs but don't want to attend school for the rest of your life and accrue thousands of dollars worth of debt before graduating, then you should consider dental employment. These jobs can be just as rewarding as other healthcare jobs, but won't require as much time in school.**

There is still a lot required of a dental nurse, but not as much as of the dentist. Dental nurses work very closely with dentists, but are not authorized to do all dentists do. Dental nurses can do office work, they can work closely with patients, and they can even work in the laboratory. Dental hygienists can remove soft and hard plaque from patients' teeth, examine patients' gums, and advise on good oral care. They also sometimes take X-rays, as necessary.

Dental nurses are required to graduate from an accredited dental hygiene program, which usually requires a high school diploma. Candidates for these programs should be strong in biology, chemistry, and math. Graduating from one of these programs usually gives candidates an associate's degree, though some offer a bachelor's or master's degree or other certification.

In addition to graduating from an accredited hygiene program, dental nurses must be licensed in the state in which they wish to practice. An exam is given by the American Dental Association's Joint Commission on National Dental Examinations. This is accepted by all fifty states. Once this is passed and a state license is obtained, candidates may begin looking for a job.

It takes a lot academically to excel as a dental nurse, but in addition nurses must have excellent people skills. Nurses work with patients every day and this requires tolerance and friendliness on the part of the dental nurse. People who come into dentists' offices are often in pain and a soothing

personality and demeanor can go a long way in putting the patient at ease.

On-the-job training is usually given to dental nurses in the specific office they are working in. Different dentists have their own way of doing things so this is normal. However, there are several things which will have been learned while earning their degree and certification. Experience under a dentist is valuable and some dental nurses may even decide to pursue a degree for a dentist after having gained some experience as a dental nurse first.

The outlook for [dental nurse jobs](#) is good over the next several years and is expected to grow by 30 percent from 2006–2016. Because there are so few people who pursue this as a career, job outlook is great in this field.

Compensation is also excellent for this position. In 2006 the middle 50 percent of dental nurses earned between \$24 and \$35 an hour. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$20 and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$41 an hour. Dental offices can also offer wonderful schedules. Some dental nurses do not have to work forty-hour work weeks or even full eight-hour days. This will depend on the area you work in as well as the dentist office you work at and how many dentists work in the practice. This is a wonderful field full of possibility. If you want to work in the healthcare field helping people then a job as a dental nurse could be just right for you.

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