



# Dental Hygienist Overview

#2 in Best Health Care Support Jobs | Overall Score 7.0 / 10

Overview Salary Reviews and Advice Job Listings

## Overview

Think of a dental hygienist as an insurance agent. "You see dentists when you have a problem," says Kelli Swanson Jaecks, president of the American Dental Hygienists' Association. "But you see dental hygienists for preventative health care."



The majority of the 183,000-plus registered dental hygienists work in dental offices alongside dentists. They will usually see a patient first and clean the patient's teeth, removing tartar, stains and plaque as they brush, floss and scrape. Dental hygienists are also involved in educating patients on the best ways to brush and floss teeth, as well as which products to use. Along with their technical skills, dental hygienists should be excellent communicators. "The client's head is in their lap basically," Swanson Jaecks says. "They should know how to read a client and relate to a client." She also says good hand-eye coordination is a must, as are critical-thinking skills, since dental hygienists are on the front lines of assessing a client's oral health.

The job market for dental hygienists is booming. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the occupation will grow 19 percent by 2024, which is much faster than the average growth rate for most professions. This swell in jobs is likely due to the increased awareness among consumers of how oral health is linked to their overall health.

"More and more dental hygienists will be hired to do this preventative health care," but Swanson Jaecks says that physicians' offices, emergency rooms and medical clinics are increasingly hiring dental hygienists to provide their patients with more holistic health care. These professionals can also be hired in academia and in research.

### Quick Stats



## Rankings

Dental Hygienists rank #2 in [Best Health Care Support Jobs](#). Jobs are ranked according to their ability to offer an elusive mix of factors. Read more about [how we rank the best jobs](#).

Dental Hygienists are ranked:

- #2 in Best Health Care Support Jobs
- #32 in The 100 Best Jobs



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## Dental Hygienists

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### Summary

#### Quick Facts: Dental Hygienists

<b>2015 Median Pay</b>	\$72,330 per year \$34.77 per hour
<b>Typical Entry-Level Education</b>	Associate's degree
<b>Work Experience in a Related Occupation</b>	None
<b>On-the-job Training</b>	None
<b>Number of Jobs, 2014</b>	200,500
<b>Job Outlook, 2014-24</b>	19% (Much faster than average)
<b>Employment Change, 2014-24</b>	37,400



Dental hygienists examine patients' teeth and gums for signs of oral diseases or abnormalities.

#### [What Dental Hygienists Do](#)

Dental hygienists clean teeth, examine patients for signs of oral diseases such as gingivitis, and provide other preventive dental care. They also educate patients on ways to improve and maintain good oral health.

#### [Work Environment](#)

In 2014, almost all dental hygienists worked in dentists' offices, and more than half worked part time.

#### [How to Become a Dental Hygienist](#)

Dental hygienists need an associate's degree in dental hygiene. Programs typically take 3 years to complete. All states require dental hygienists to be licensed; requirements vary by state.

#### [Pay](#)

The median annual wage for dental hygienists was \$72,330 in May 2015.

#### [Job Outlook](#)

Employment of dental hygienists is projected to grow 19 percent from 2014 to 2024, much faster than the average for all occupations. Ongoing research linking oral health to general health will continue to spur demand for preventive dental services, which are provided by dental hygienists.

#### [State & Area Data](#)

Explore resources for employment and wages by state and area for 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 They Do ->](#)

#### SUGGESTED CITATION:

Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2016-17 Edition, Dental Hygienists, on the Internet at <http://www.bls.gov/oooh/healthcare/dental-hygienists.htm> (visited September 12, 2016).



# Education & Careers

## Career Paths

### Define your role.

Working in a private dental office continues to be the primary place of employment for dental hygienists. For today's dental hygiene professional, there are many other career pathways to explore as well. Never before has there been more opportunity for professional growth. How and where you work today is up to you.

Let your dental hygiene education and experience open doors to YOUR career path and consider the possibilities...

### Learn More

Thinking Outside the Box: [The Path to a New Career \(/resources-docs/72615\\_The\\_Path\\_to\\_a\\_New\\_Career.pdf\)](/resources-docs/72615_The_Path_to_a_New_Career.pdf)

### Clinician:

Dental hygienists in a clinical role assess, diagnose, plan, implement, evaluate and document treatment for prevention, intervention and control of oral diseases, while practicing in collaboration with other health professionals. Examples of clinical settings include:

- Private dental practices
- Community clinics
- Hospitals
- University dental clinics
- Prison facilities
- Nursing homes
- Schools

### Corporate:

Corporate dental hygienists are employed by companies that support the oral health industry through the sale of products and services. Leaders throughout the dental industry often employ dental hygienists due to their clinical experience and understanding of dental practice. Examples of corporate positions include:

- Sales representatives
- Product researchers
- Corporate educators
- Corporate administrators

## Public Health:

Community Health programs are typically funded by government or nonprofit organizations. These positions often offer an opportunity to provide care to those who otherwise would not have access to dental care. Examples of public health opportunities include a variety of roles and settings:

- Clinicians, Administrators, Researchers
- State Public Health Officer
- Community Clinic Administrator
- Indian Health Service
- Head Start programs
- Local health departments
- National Health Service Corps
- School sealant programs
- Rural or inner city community clinics

## Researcher:

Research conducted by dental hygienists can be either qualitative or quantitative. Quantitative research involves conducting surveys & analyzing the results, while qualitative research may involve testing a new procedure, product, or theory for accuracy or effectiveness. Examples of research settings include:

- Colleges and universities
- Corporations
- Governmental agencies
- Nonprofit organizations

## Educator:

Dental Hygiene educators are in great demand. Colleges and universities throughout the U. S. require dental hygiene instructors who use educational theory and methodology to educate competent oral health care professionals. Corporations also employ educators who provide continuing education to licensed dental hygienists. Examples of education positions may be full time or part time and include:

- Clinical instructors
- Classroom instructors
- Program directors
- Corporate educators

## Administrator:

Dental hygienists in administrative positions apply organizational skills, communicate objectives, identify and manage resources, and evaluate and modify programs of health, education and health care. Examples of administrative positions include:

- Clinical Director, statewide school sealant program
- Program Director, dental hygiene educational program
- Dean of Health Sciences, educational institution
- Executive Director, state association staff
- Director, corporate sales

## Entrepreneur:

By using imagination and creativity to initiate or finance new commercial enterprises, dental hygienists have become successful entrepreneurs in a variety of businesses. Entrepreneurial opportunities developed by dental hygienists include:

- Product Development and Sales
- Practice Management Company
- Employment Service
- CE provider or Meeting Planner
- Consulting Business
- Founder of Nonprofit
- Independent Clinical Practice
- Professional Speaker / Writer

[Learn more \(/working\)](#) about the [education \(/dental-hygiene-programs\)](#), [licensure \(/licensure\)](#), and training required for dental hygiene career options.



## Dental Hygienist

### Job Description

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 about 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)
- performing documentation and office management activities

### Career Advantages

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 and availability of evening and weekend hours enable 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 future. 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.

- [Fact Sheet \(PDF\)](#)

## **Opportunities**

Hygienists are in demand in general dental practices and in specialty practices such as periodontics or pediatric dentistry. They also may 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 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. Employment opportunities also may be available with companies that market dental-related materials and equipment.

## **Dental Hygienist Career Video**

Personal satisfaction, prestige, variety, job security and flexibility are promoted in this video. Specific information about job responsibilities, education, training and job opportunities also are addressed.

Watch a preview of the video below.



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## Dental Hygienists

**Also called:** Dental Hygienist; Dental Hygienist, Mobile Coordinator; Hygienist; Registered Dental Hygienist (RDH)

### What they do:

Clean teeth and examine oral areas, head, and neck for signs of oral disease. May educate patients on oral hygiene, take and develop x rays, or apply fluoride or sealants.

### On the job, you would:

- Clean calcareous deposits, accretions, and stains from teeth and beneath margins of gums, using dental instruments.
- Record and review patient medical histories.
- Examine gums, using probes, to locate periodontal recessed gums and signs of gum disease.

## KNOWLEDGE

### Health

- medicine and dentistry

### Business

- customer service
- sales and marketing

### Arts and Humanities

- English language

### Math and Science

- psychology

## SKILLS

### Basic Skills

- talking to others
- listening to others, not interrupting, and asking good questions

### Social

- looking for ways to help people
- understanding people's reactions

## ABILITIES

### Verbal

- communicate by speaking
- listen and understand what people say

### Hand and Finger Use

- put together small parts with your fingers
- keep your arm or hand steady

### Attention

- pay attention to something without being distracted
- do two or more things at the same time

### Ideas and Logic

- notice when problems happen

## PERSONALITY

People interested in this work like activities that include **helping people, teaching,** and talking.

They do well at jobs that need:

- **Dependability**
- **Attention to Detail**
- **Concern for Others**
- **Integrity**
- **Cooperation**
- **Self Control**

## TECHNOLOGY

You might use software like this on the job:

### Medical software

- Dental charting software
- Dental office management software

### Spreadsheet software

- Microsoft Excel

### Electronic mail software

- Email software

TECHNOLOGY

EDUCATION

JOB OUTLOOK



## EDUCATION



**associate's degree** or  
**bachelor's degree**  
usually needed

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## OUTLOOK



New job opportunities are **very likely** in the future.

**SALARY:**  
**\$72,330**  
per year, on average

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<b>Occupation:</b>	<b>Dental Hygienist</b>
<b>Agency:</b>	IDFPR - Division of Professional Regulation
<b>Phone:</b>	217.782.8556
<b>URL:</b>	
<b>Job Description:</b>	An individual who, under the supervision of a dentist, is engaged in helping people prevent tooth decay and gum disease and maintain oral health. The person examines teeth and gums, cleans deposits and stains from teeth, and treats teeth with fluorides and other decay preventive agents. A dental hygienist takes impressions of teeth and removes sutures, temporary crowns, and restorations. May also take and develop X-rays and perform dental health education functions.
<b>Statute:</b>	The Illinois Dental Practice Act (225 ILCS 1996 25/1 - 25/57, Inclusive) 68 Ill. Admin. Code 1220
<b>Type of Regulation:</b>	License
<b>Number Regulated:</b>	7,768
<b>Age:</b>	No requirement
<b>Education/Experience:</b>	High school graduate or its equivalent; Certification of successful completion of two (2) academic years of credit from a dental hygiene program approved by the Commission on Dental Accreditation of the American Dental Association; Current valid certification in cardiopulmonary resuscitation.
<b>Exam:</b>	Two examinations are required: National Dental Hygiene Examination. Administered by the American Dental Association; 211 East Chicago Avenue; Chicago, Illinois 60611-2678.
<b>Exam Type:</b>	Written and/or clinical
<b>Administered:</b>	March/April, July, December
<b>Exam Fee:</b>	Refer to testing entities
<b>Passing Criteria:</b>	The passing score accepted by the Division shall be the passing score established by the testing entity. a. Northeast Regional Board (NERB) Examination in Dental Hygiene within the past five years. Exam given by the Northeast Regional Board of Dental Exam
<b>Repeats:</b>	Retake requirements shall be that of the testing entity.

<b>Continuing Education:</b>	36 credit hours and current CPR certification
<b>Citizenship:</b>	
<b>Other:</b>	Must be of good moral character
<b>Note:</b>	Licensure requirements, licensure fees, examination fees and exam administration are subject to change.
<b>Application Fee:</b>	
<b>License Fee:</b>	\$100.00 by examination; \$100.00 by endorsement
<b>Renewal Fee:</b>	\$20.00 plus all lapsed renewal fees not to exceed \$85.00
<b>Reinstatement Fee:</b>	Three years
<b>License Period:</b>	Yes. Have been licensed by exam and engaged in lawful practice of dental hygiene for three (3) of the last five (5) years; Must be of good moral character; Must meet all of the Illinois requirements in education and training; Must submit proof of current vali
<b>Reciprocity/Endorsement:</b>	

### **IDES Website**

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