

Information Sheet No 11

Advice For Patients Visiting Hygienist

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Carntyne Dental Care

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Advice For Patients Visiting The Hygienist

What Is A Hygienist?

A hygienist works with a dentist to help patients care for their teeth. The role is a combination of a clinician, treating and preventing gum (periodontal) disease and decay (caries) and a communicator/educator, teaching and motivating patients to care for their own teeth and gums.

Hygienists are specially trained for this work, doing a course at a school of dental hygiene accredited by a university. In the future, some may be trained to degree level in oral health care.

What Does A Hygienist Do?

Clinical Tasks

The hygienist's prime role is to prevent and treat periodontal disease, whilst working to a treatment plan written by the dentist. Each patient needs to be monitored according to his/her periodontal disease pattern to ensure it remains stable. At this surgery, at the initial visit the hygienist will carry out a basic examination to assess your periodontal health status and use a fine instrument to measure and chart the depth of any 'pockets' around your teeth, not everyone may have them. She will then carry out a range of professional cleaning tasks specific to each patient's particular requirements. She may also apply particular medications and solutions to the mouth and gums to kill bacteria and prevent gum disease. Your hygienist will then develop with you a maintenance programme for your mouth to keep it as clean and healthy as possible.

For children, the hygienist can help by cleaning and polishing the teeth, as well as carrying out some specialist treatments, such as the application of fissure sealants, a plastic coating which prevents decay occurring, or fluoride applications.

Advice and Education

The hygienist can advise you on a range of oral health procedures tailored for your needs, and demonstrate how to carry them out effectively. These include:

- * flossing
- * brushing
- * interdental cleaning
- * subgingival (below the gum) cleaning

She can also recommend the most suitable products to carry out these procedures. The hygienist is also qualified to advise and help with more general issues concerning oral health, such as dietary advice or help in giving up smoking. Often the hygienist is the only health professional with time to spend with patients discussing these issues.

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Why Should I Visit The Hygienist?

Visiting the hygienist regularly is important to help maintain good oral hygiene and anticipate problems that may arise. The hygienist works in a team with the dentist and you, the patient, to provide a programme of oral care which is appropriate to your needs and lifestyle, and is an excellent source of advice on all matters of oral health.

How Often Should I see The Hygienist?

This will vary, depending on your state of oral health and is completely individual to each patient. In the initial phase of treatment, the dentist may recommend that some patients see the hygienist every 2,3 or 4 weeks, until a problem is brought under control. After that, depending on what is needed, it may be at monthly, 3 monthly or 6 monthly intervals.

How To Get The Most Benefit From Seeing The Hygienist?

In the surgery: Ask questions and seek clarification of anything you are unclear about. Ask the hygienist to demonstrate any tricky procedures, such as flossing. If problems develop between visits, tell the hygienist about them so that she can advise or treat you appropriately.

Between visits: Try and carry out the cleaning procedures as best you can, and stick to the programme suggested by your hygienist. Although the hygienist plays a crucial part in maintaining the hygiene of your mouth, the most important person responsible for your oral health is yourself.