

The foundation for good dental health



The dental exam and diagnosis is the foundation of oral health. Your dentist is able to detect and diagnose oral health problems to stop disease from advancing.

As with your overall health, prevention and early detection are the cornerstones of good dental health. Regular brushing, flossing, good nutrition and not smoking all have a role to play in reducing the risk of cavities, gum disease and other oral disease.

Equally important is a regular dental exam, even if you wear dentures, which can identify and diagnose problems before they become more serious.

“Dental disease often does not show symptoms until the disease has progressed,” said Dr. Bruce Ward, spokesperson for the British Columbia Dental Association. “Patients are not aware that a problem exists until they have pain or swelling. Unlike other illnesses or diseases, dental disease is not reversible so catching it early is critical to prevent ongoing problems or negative health impacts.”

By understanding what the dentist is looking for during an exam and speaking with your dentist about your diagnosis you can make informed decisions about your dental health needs.

Each patient is unique so the specific components of the dental examination will vary based on your current oral and general health, lifestyle factors and frequency of professional dental cleanings.

It is also important to understand that your dental insurance coverage is based on the plan purchased by your employer for all employees, which may or may not cover your unique oral health care needs. Review your plan and discuss this with your dentist so that you can understand your options and can make the best decision for your own health.

During the dental examination your dentist will inspect a number of important areas and functions of your mouth to identify any early signs of dental disease and prevent small problems from becoming big ones.

Your dentist may perform parts of the examination in partnership with other members of the dental team and will gather all the necessary information to make an informed diagnosis.

Your dentist may look at some or all of the following during your examination:

- Medical history including health conditions or medications that could impact dental care or treatment.
- X-rays are a valuable diagnostic tool that may be taken to see what’s going on below the surface of the teeth and gums.
- Oral hygiene to confirm plaque and tartar levels that affect gums and teeth.
- The gums will be examined for signs of disease such as redness, swelling or infection.
- Soft tissue health, including the lips, tongue, cheeks and upper and lower surfaces of the mouth for signs of oral cancer or sensitivity.
- The condition of teeth to identify any damaged or decayed teeth along with the condition of any dental prosthesis (e.g. dentures).
- Existing dental work, such as fillings, root canals and crowns will also be inspected.
- Jaw function: how the teeth are fitting together and the bite. The overall health and function of the temporomandibular joint (joint that joins the jaw to the skull).
- The general condition of the bones in the face, jaw and around the mouth.
- The normal growth and development of baby and permanent teeth in children.

Talk to your dentist if you have any questions about your dental exam, diagnosis or treatment options.