

# DENTAL HYGIENE

## Professional Outlook

Licensed dental hygienists provide educational, clinical, research, administrative and therapeutic services supporting total health through the promotion of optimal oral health.

Dental hygiene has been identified as one of the top 30 fastest growing health care professions in the United States. Dental hygienists are employed in a variety of settings including private dental offices, public health, schools, hospitals, nursing homes, correctional facilities and many other settings. The increase in demand for dental hygiene services is stimulated by the recognition of the importance of prevention of oral diseases and the relationship of oral health to overall total health. Increases in population growth, in particular the elderly population with greater retention of their natural teeth and children in need of preventive dental services, has also attributed to the increase in demand of dental hygienists.

This information was  
prepared by the American  
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Association

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## Earnings

Earnings of dental hygienists are affected by geographic location, employment setting, education and experience. Dental hygienists who work in a dental office may be paid on an hourly, daily, salary or commission basis. The median hourly earnings for U.S. dental hygienists were \$26.59 in 2002.



Dental Hygienists are licensed health care professionals with extensive educational preparation in the delivery of oral health care. Many services are provided by dental hygienists emphasizing the importance of oral health to overall health. A variety of career opportunities are available to dental hygienists including positions as clinicians, administrative managers, educators, researchers, consumer advocates and change agents.



## Dental Hygiene Services

Health care services provided by dental hygienists are determined by state laws and regulations, but can include the following:

- Oral health assessments to include the identification of oral conditions such as dental caries (cavities) and periodontal (gum) disease and oral cancer
- Examination of the head and neck area to check for abnormalities
- Review of medical and dental histories to assess overall systemic health
- Application of caries-preventive agents such as fluorides or dental sealants
- Oral prophylaxis — removal of plaque, stain and calculus (tartar)
- Periodontal procedures for the treatment of periodontal (gum) disease
- Administration of local anesthesia and/or nitrous oxide analgesia
- Health education and preventive counseling of groups and individuals
- Dental radiographs (x-rays)
- Dietary/nutritional counseling

## Admissions

Admission requirements and prerequisites vary by institution but usually include the following elements:

- High school diploma or GED
- Minimum age of 18
- High school coursework in mathematics, chemistry, biology and English
- College entrance test scores
- Prerequisite college coursework in chemistry, English, communications, psychology, sociology and the humanities

## Examination and Licensure

By 1951, all states had licensure requirements for dental hygienists. ADHA supports graduation from an accredited dental hygiene program as a requirement for dental hygiene licensure.



In order to be eligible for regional and/or state clinical licensure examinations, after graduation from an accredited dental hygiene program, dental hygienists must also pass the written National Board Dental Hygiene Examination administered by the American Dental Association Joint Commission on National Dental Examinations. The purpose of the national examination is to assist state boards in determining qualifications of dental hygiene licensure applicants. Graduation from an accredited dental hygiene program, successful completion of the written National Dental Hygiene Board, and regional/state clinical examination assure the public that dental hygienists are qualified to provide appropriate care.

## Accredited Education

In order to be licensed as a dental hygienist, one must graduate from an accredited dental hygiene education program with an academic curriculum of at least two academic years of full-time instruction or its equivalent at the postsecondary college level. Candidates for licensure must also pass the National Board Dental Hygiene Examination and a state/regional clinical licensure examination.

Entry-level dental hygiene educational programs are offered at universities, community colleges and technical institutions with programs of two or four years in length. Graduates may obtain a certificate, associate or baccalaureate degree.

Degree-completion and graduate programs in dental hygiene are also available.

