



Dental exam and cleaning

Also known as: Checkup • Oral evaluation

Prophylaxis • Teeth cleaning • Scaling and polishing

What's the difference?

Although many people combine them into one appointment, a dental cleaning and a dental exam are two different procedures.

Did you know?

Children should get their first dental exam by age 1.

American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry

During a cleaning,

your dentist or dental hygienist scrapes plaque and tartar from your teeth.

In an exam,

the dentist will carefully look at your teeth, mouth and throat to identify any problems, such as cavities, gum disease, loose fillings and oral cancer.

If you are receiving a cleaning and exam during the same appointment, the cleaning usually happens first.

How often do you need them?



The American Dental Association recommends getting a cleaning and exam every six months, which is why most dental plans cover two exams and two cleanings a year.

If you're at high risk, however, you may need more frequent exams and cleanings. Risk factors include the following:

- Diabetes
- Smoking
- Weak immune system
- Cavity-prone
- Pregnancy
- Gum disease



Did you know?

Nearly 12% of adults ages 20 to 64 have not been to the dentist in the last five years.

National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research

Dental cleaning

1. Your dentist or hygienist will remove plaque and tartar using either a metal scaler, which physically scrapes off bacterial build-up, or an ultrasonic scaler, which uses vibration.
2. Water will be squirted into your mouth to rinse off the plaque. Then, a suction tool will suck it right up.
3. Your teeth will be polished with a gritty toothpaste.
4. Your teeth will be flossed.
5. Your dentist or hygienist will discuss any problems with your teeth or gums and may advise you on a better brushing or flossing technique.

Dental exam

1. Your dentist will look in your mouth with a mirror and small instruments.
2. He or she will examine the alignment of your teeth and check for signs of grinding.
3. You can ask any questions about the health of your mouth.

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