

Why doesn't the dentist do this work?

Some dentists without hygienists will do this work. A hygienist can deliver the same level of care and attention at a fraction of the cost to the patient. Availability is less of an issue and although she mainly works in cooperation with the dentist's treatment plan, you as a patient can book an appointment directly with her without the need to see a dentist first.

Can a hygienist do anything else?

- ◆ Dental Xrays
- ◆ Impressions for sports guards
- ◆ Administer fluoride varnishes
- ◆ Tooth whitening
- ◆ Administer fissure sealants
- ◆ Provide temporary fillings
- ◆ Scale and polishes/ stain removal for that special occasion

What else can I do?

- ◆ Stop smoking – this heavily reduces your chance of getting gum disease.
- ◆ Clean between your teeth using floss or interdental brushes.
- ◆ Up to 40% of your tooth surface is inaccessible to the toothbrush. Anywhere not routinely cleaned is many more times at risk from decay and gum disease. Use the instruments recommended by your hygienist and avoid cheap internet alternatives which may not be so effective.
- ◆ Brush your teeth last thing at night and at least one other time during the day, with a fluoride toothpaste. Remember to "spit not rinse".
- ◆ Cut down on sugary foods and drinks. If you are on regular medication ask if there are no sugar formulations.



General
Dental
Council

protecting patients,
regulating the dental team

BDA
British Dental Association



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Dental Hygienist

Ilfracombe Dental Practice



"Getting to the "root" of a brighter, whiter, healthier smile"



What is a Dental Hygienist?

Dental Hygienists are specially trained in the subjects of; oral care, nutrition, prevention, radiology, immunology, pharmacology, oral pathology, physiology and bacterial science so that they can deliver preventive dental health and treat gum disease. They play an important role delivering appropriate support to treatment prescribed by your dentist and can also accept patients without a referral. They are trained to administer anaesthetics enabling them to offer the same painless treatment a dentist can offer.

Why is preventive dental care so important?

Most have heard that prevention is better than cure but why? Disease is defined as a process that causes permanent loss of function to the affected tissue. In the case of gum disease, the architecture of our mouths which helps protect us from bacterial infection becomes compromised and we become more prone to further spells of disease. This is also the case in dental decay and both can lead to severe pain, infection and eventual tooth loss.

What is preventive dental care?

Preventive care identifies and assesses possible risk factors that increase the likelihood of a person's susceptibility to dental disease and provides a plan to prevent or minimize the impact of these factors. These factors fall under general and local categories. Examples of general factors that influence oral disease include; the overall health of you as a patient, medication side effects, smoking and nutrition. Examples of local factors are; tooth position, presence of tartar and complex restorations such as crowns, bridges, large fillings, dentures and implants.

How many people suffer from gum disease and tooth decay?

Everyone at some time in their lives will suffer to some degree from gum disease so it is important that everyone should know how to prevent it. Knowing the limitations of your own mouth and how well you clean it is a great start.

Almost half the population in the UK suffer from dental decay. The risk from decay can be halved if you use a suitable fluoride toothpaste regularly and in the right way.

We can identify who is more susceptible, but from what?

There is only one primary cause of dental decay and gum disease (periodontitis) and that is dental plaque. Plaque is a complex biofilm that builds up on your teeth, gums and soft tissues of the mouth. It changes with time it is left on these tissues and becomes more harmful to the mouth, so time is of the essence. Everyone has plaque but everyone's plaque is slightly different because we eat different things, come into different environments and our bodies react to different bacteria in different ways. There is currently research into vaccines to combat against certain identifiable harmful bacteria in plaque but until these have been properly developed, treatment centres around removing plaque as much as possible at regular intervals that allows the body to cope and repair.

What does the hygienist actually do?

The hygienist's main work includes professionally cleaning your teeth by removing plaque and tartar from your teeth and gums. The most important role is showing you the best way to keep your mouth free of plaque. They often use hand scalers and water driven scalers called cavitrons. These instruments are not harmful to your teeth and gums and are the best way of removing that damaging plaque. They will also give advice about diet and appropriate dental products to use.

How do I know if this treatment is working?

The early stage of gum disease is called gingivitis. The symptoms are swollen, red gums that bleed easily when you brush and eat hard foods. You and others may notice a bad odour from your mouth and you may have a feeling

that your gums feel hot and achy. With good oral care, this can be stopped. The later stage of gum disease is called periodontitis. Symptoms will include pus from the gums, tooth tenderness, mobility and spontaneous tooth loss. This stage can not be reversed but slowed, alleviating the symptoms. Hygienists will monitor plaque levels, bleeding levels and measure how much supporting bone is lost. Comparing readings over visits gives them a good idea of the progression and site of the disease. This is vital in identifying and need for future treatment and where in the mouth.

What help is there for children?

Children can have their teeth polished and given instruction on how to properly brush their teeth so they develop a good routine. Some children identified as having higher than normal risk of decay can be given fluoride gels and fissure sealants. Sealants can only be placed on healthy teeth as they are a preventive measure unfortunately once there is a hole, it is too late and they will need a filling.

Children with fixed braces will definitely require additional attention as food debris will regularly lodge in their braces.

How can I help my hygienist/ How can I get the best from my hygiene appointment?

Be honest with her about your daily hygiene regime, medical history, diet and smoking habits. She is trained to spot problems with routines and techniques and will provide non-judgemental advice. Bring in the products you use, especially your tooth brush. She will be able to assess the suitability to your mouth. Brush your teeth before you come. It is the best way to assess your brushing technique after you have just brushed, not after a day's food debris and she can then show if and where you are going wrong. Even the smallest correction can save a tooth!