

Dental Terminology & Definitions

Here is a comprehensive list of common dental terminology and terms you may hear or read as you learn more about oral health.

Abrasion

Tooth wear caused by forces other than chewing such as holding objects between the teeth or improper brushing.

Abutment

A tooth (or implant) that supports a dental prosthesis.

Anesthesia

General Anesthesia: A controlled state of unconsciousness, accompanied by a partial or complete loss of protective reflexes, including loss of ability to independently maintain airway and respond purposefully to physical stimulation or verbal command, produced by a pharmacologic or non-pharmacologic method or combination thereof.

Intravenous Sedation/Analgesia: A medically controlled state of depressed consciousness while maintaining the patient's airway, protective reflexes and the ability to respond to stimulation or verbal commands. It includes intravenous administration of a sedative and/or analgesic agent(s) and appropriate monitoring.

Local Anesthesia: The loss of pain sensation over a specific area of the anatomy without loss of consciousness.

Non-Intravenous Conscious Sedation: A medically controlled state of depressed consciousness while maintaining the patient's airway, protective reflexes and the ability to respond to stimulation or verbal commands. It includes administration of sedative and/or analgesic agent(s) by a route other than IV (PO, PR, Intranasal, IM), and appropriate monitoring.

Regional Anesthesia: A term used for local anesthesia.

Apicoectomy

Removal of the tip of a tooth root.

Arch

Term used to refer to an upper or lower denture.

Basic Cleaning

Basic or routine cleaning for a normal amount of plaque build-up. Preventive treatment for patients with healthy gum tissue, not intended for patients with past history of or current gum disease. Price does not include a periodic examination, X-rays or fluoride treatment.

Bicuspid

A premolar tooth; a tooth with two cusps.

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Bilateral

Occurring on, or pertaining to, both right and left sides.

Biopsy

Process of removing tissue for histologic evaluation.

Bleaching

A cosmetic dental procedure that whitens the teeth using a bleaching solution.

Bonding

A composite resin applied to a tooth to change its shape and/or color. Bonding also refers to how a filling, orthodontic appliance or some fixed partial dentures are attached to teeth.

Calculus

Hard deposit of mineralized material adhering to crowns and/or roots of teeth.

Caries

Commonly used term for tooth decay.

Cavity

Decay in tooth caused by caries; also referred to as carious lesion.

Cementum

Hard connective tissue covering the tooth root.

Composite

A dental restorative material made up of disparate or separate parts (e.g., resin and quartz particles).

Crown

Crown - Simple crown procedure utilizing a porcelain crown fused to non-precious metal and not involving complicated prep.

Anatomical Crown - That portion of tooth normally covered by, and including, enamel.

Abutment Crown - Artificial crown serving for the retention or support of a dental prosthesis.

Artificial Crown - Restoration covering or replacing the major part, or the whole, of the clinical crown of a tooth.

Cusp

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The pointed portion of the tooth.

Decay

The lay term for carious lesions in a tooth; decomposition of tooth structure.

Dental Prophylaxis

Scaling and polishing procedure performed to remove coronal plaque, calculus, and stains.

Dental Prosthesis

An artificial device that replaces one or more missing teeth.

Dental Specialist

A dentist who has received postgraduate training in one of the recognized dental specialties.

DDS

Doctor of Dental Surgery

DMD

Doctor of Dental Medicine

Dentin

The part of the tooth that is beneath the enamel and cementum.

Denture

An artificial substitute for natural teeth and adjacent tissues.

Denture Base

The part of the denture that holds the artificial teeth and fits over the gums.

Direct Restoration

A restoration fabricated inside the mouth.

Dry Mouth

The condition of not having enough saliva to keep the mouth wet. If it goes untreated, severe dry mouth can lead to increased levels of tooth decay and infections of the mouth.

Enamel

Hard calcified tissue covering dentin of the crown of tooth.

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Endodontist

A dental specialist who limits his/her practice to treating disease and injuries of the pulp and associated periradicular conditions.

Erosion

Wearing down of tooth structure, caused by chemicals (acids).

Excision

Surgical removal of bone or tissue.

Extraction

Extraction - The process or act of removing a tooth or tooth parts.

Simple Extraction - Simple tooth extraction not requiring sectioning of the tooth or other extraordinary procedures for removal.

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Filling

Filling - A lay term used for the restoring of lost tooth structure by using materials such as metal, alloy, plastic or porcelain.

Amalgam - Single surface silver filling.

Composite - Single surface composite filling (white or tooth colored) performed on a tooth in the front of the mouth.

Fixed Appliances

Orthodontic devices, commonly known as braces, that are bonded to the teeth to produce different tooth movements to help reposition teeth for orthodontic therapy.

Fracture

The breaking of a part, especially of a bony structure; breaking of a tooth.

Full-Mouth X-Rays

A combination of 14 or more periapical and 4 bitewing films of the back teeth. This series of x-rays reveals all the teeth (their crowns and roots) and the alveolar bone around them.

Gingiva

Soft tissues overlying the crowns of unerupted teeth and encircling the necks of those that have erupted.

Gingivitis

Inflammation of gingival tissue without loss of connective tissue.

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Graft

A piece of tissue or alloplastic material placed in contact with tissue to repair a defect or supplement a deficiency.

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Immediate Denture

Prosthesis constructed for placement immediately after removal of remaining natural teeth.

Impacted Tooth

An unerupted or partially erupted tooth that is positioned against another tooth, bone, or soft tissue, so that complete eruption is unlikely.

Implant

Implant - Material inserted or grafted into tissue.

Dental Implant - A device specially designed to be placed surgically within or on the mandibular or maxillary bone as a means of providing for dental replacement; endosteal (endosseous); eposteal subperiosteal); transosteal (transosseous).

Interproximal

Between the teeth.

Intraoral

Inside the mouth.

Jaw

A common name for either the maxilla or the mandible.

Labial

Pertaining to or around the lip.

Lesion

An injury or wound; area of diseased tissue.

Lingual

Pertaining tongue; surface of the tooth directed toward the tongue; opposite of facial.

Malignant

Having the properties of dysplasia, invasion, and metastasis.

Malocclusion

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Improper alignment of biting or chewing surfaces of upper and lower teeth.

Maxilla

The upper jaw.

Molar

Teeth posterior to the premolars (bicuspid) on either side of the jaw; grinding teeth, having large crowns and broad chewing surfaces.

Occlusal

Pertaining to the biting surfaces of the premolar and molar teeth or contacting surfaces of opposing teeth or opposing occlusion rims.

Oral

Pertaining to the mouth.

Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeon

A dental specialist whose practice is limited to the diagnosis, surgical and adjunctive treatment of diseases, injuries, deformities, defects and esthetic aspects of the oral and maxillofacial regions.

Orthodontist

A dental specialist whose practice is limited to the interception and treatment of malocclusion of the teeth and their surrounding structures.

Overdenture

A removable prosthetic device that overlies and may be supported by retained tooth roots or implants.

Palate

The hard and soft tissues forming the roof of the mouth that separates the oral and nasal cavities.

Partial Denture

Usually refers to a prosthetic device that replaces missing teeth.

Periodontal

Pertaining to the supporting and surrounding tissues of the teeth.

Periodontal Abscess

An infection in the gum pocket that can destroy hard and soft tissues.

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Periodontal Disease

Inflammatory process of the gingival tissues and/or periodontal membrane of the teeth, resulting in an abnormally deep gingival sulcus, possibly producing periodontal pockets and loss of supporting alveolar bone.

Periodontitis

Inflammation and loss of the connective tissue of the supporting or surrounding structure of teeth with loss of attachment.

Plaque

A soft sticky substance that accumulates on teeth composed largely of bacteria and bacterial derivatives.

Prophylaxis

Scaling and polishing procedure performed to remove coronal plaque, calculus and stains.

Pulp

Connective tissue containing blood vessels and nerve tissue which occupies the pulp cavity of a tooth.

Radiograph

An image produced by projecting radiation, as X-rays, on photographic film. Commonly called an X-ray.

Reline

To resurface the side of the denture that is in contact with the soft tissues of the mouth to make it fit more securely.

Removable Partial Denture (removable bridge)

A prosthetic replacement of one or more missing teeth that can be removed by the patient.

Root

The anatomic portion of the tooth that is covered by cementum and is located in the alveolus (socket) where it is attached by the periodontal apparatus; radicular portion of tooth.

Root Canal

The portion of the pulp cavity inside the root of a tooth; the chamber within the root of the tooth that contains the pulp.

Scaling

Removal of plaque, calculus, and stain from teeth.

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Sealants

Plastic resin placed on the biting surfaces of molars to prevent bacteria from attacking the enamel and causing caries.

Submandibular Glands

Walnut-sized major salivary glands located beneath the tongue.

Suture

Stitch used to repair incision or wound.

Temporary Removable Denture

An interim prosthesis designed for use over a limited period of time.

Temporo-mandibular-joint (TMJ)

The connecting hinge mechanism between the base of the skull (temporal bone) and the lower jaw (mandible).

Unerupted

Tooth/teeth that have not penetrated into the oral cavity.

Veneer

In the construction of crowns or pontics, a layer of tooth-colored material usually, but not limited to, composite, porcelain, ceramic or acrylic resin, attached to the surface by direct fusion, cementation, or mechanical retention; also refers to a restoration that is luted to the facial surface of a tooth.