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What Happens During a Teeth Cleaning Appointment?

by Sarah Carpenter

You've probably heard that having your teeth professionally cleaned every six months is good for your health. So, you've made your appointment with the dentist, and you're ready to go. Now you may be wondering what happens during a regular teeth cleaning appointment, and how can you prepare for it? Let's look at the details of the dental cleaning procedure, how long it takes, what diagnostics and assessments are done and what types of additional dental work a teeth cleaning might reveal.

What to Expect During the Appointment

The [American Dental Association](#) recommends that adults and children have their teeth professionally cleaned at least twice a year to help prevent tooth decay and gum disease. Performed at a dentist's office by either a dentist or dental hygienist, they usually occur alongside a comprehensive dental exam. For most people, teeth cleaning is a simple and painless process. Just in case you're nervous about it, we'll go over what to expect to help ease your mind.

Physical Exam

[Most teeth cleanings](#) are performed by a dental hygienist. Before the actual cleaning process begins, they'll start with a physical exam of your entire mouth. They'll use a small mirror to check around your teeth and gums for any signs of gingivitis (inflamed gums) or other potential concerns. If they detect major problems, the dental hygienist might call the dentist over to make sure it's fine to proceed.

Take X-Rays

Dental x-rays are pictures taken of your mouth using high-energy electromagnetic radiation. Seated in a dental chair, the technician will place a lead apron over your chest and an x-ray sensor or film will be placed in your mouth for the pictures.

Plaque and Tartar Removal

With a small mirror to guide them, the dental hygienist uses a tool called a scaler to get rid of plaque and tartar around your gumline, as well as in-between your teeth. You'll hear a scraping sound, but this is normal. The more tartar there is in your mouth, the more time they'll take to scrape a particular spot.

Polishing Your Teeth

After your teeth are completely tartar-free, the hygienist brushes them using a gritty toothpaste-like material and a high-powered electric brush. This helps remove stains, making your teeth look shiny and white again. It's also a great way to get a deep clean and remove any tartar left behind from the scaler.

Expert Flossing

Your dental hygienist will use dental floss to go deep between your teeth to locate any potential trouble spots where your gums might. Having a professional floss your teeth also removes any leftover plaque or toothpaste from earlier in the cleaning process.

Rinsing

Next, you'll rinse out your mouth to get rid of any leftover debris. Your dental hygienist will usually give you a rinse that contains liquid fluoride.

Fluoride Treatment

The last step of the cleaning process (if your dentist or hygienist decides you need one) is a fluoride treatment. It helps your teeth fight against cavities for several months. Your dental hygienist may ask you what flavor you like best. Then, they'll place either a foamy gel (or sometimes a sticky paste) into a mouthpiece that fits over your teeth. They could also paint a fluoride varnish right onto your teeth with a small brush.

How to Prepare for a Teeth Cleaning

It's a good idea to brush and floss your teeth prior to your dental cleaning procedure. This will help remove any food particles or stains from your teeth. [You can also use mouthwash](#) to remove any lingering bacteria from your mouth and ensure that you have fresh breath for your checkup. Do not eat, drink or smoke a few hours prior to your appointment to prevent food debris from lodging in your teeth and harmful chemicals from affecting your enamel.

How Long Does a Teeth Cleaning Take?

A dental cleaning appointment typically takes 45 minutes to one hour, on average. The cleaning portion of your visit will usually take approximately 40 minutes while the other portion of your visit including the exam, oral cancer screening, x-rays and home care instructions make up the rest of the time.

After Your Cleaning

Congratulations! Your teeth cleaning is complete. If during your dental cleaning procedure the dentist or hygienist found any oral issues, they will discuss them with you now. During your cleaning, they were evaluating your gum tissue, checking for oral cancer, gingivitis or periodontal disease. They also looked for cavities and any other issues in your mouth requiring further treatment. If they identified any problem areas, they'll address them with you before you go and will set future appointments for treatment, if necessary.

Contact West Coast Dental Today

Getting your teeth cleaned every six months is good for your health, and we're here to help. Contact West Coast Dental anytime. We are pleased to accept most [dental insurance plans](#). Give us a call at [888-329-8111](#) to make an appointment or [book online](#).

Sarah Carpenter is a freelance writer whose portfolio spans the industries of healthcare, higher education and entertainment. Find out more at [her website](#).

References

American Dental Association — [Home Oral Care](#)

Healthline — [What Happens During a Teeth Cleaning?](#)

Colgate — [How to Get Your Teeth Clean Before the Dentist](#)