

Understanding Your Dental Visit



A Plain Language Guide to Common Dental Procedures




How to Use This Guide

This guide explains what your dental team is recommending, why it is needed, and what to expect.


Use it to:

- Review treatment at home before your appointment.
- Share with your support person, care partner, family member, or anyone who comes with you.
- Prepare questions to ask your dentist.
- Know your choices and how to ask for what you need.

Important: This is a general guide. Every person is different. Your experience may look different from what is described here. Always follow the instructions your dental team gives you. If anything is confusing, call or message your dental office, they are happy to help.

 You are in control	Reminders about your choices and how to signal your dental team.
 Sensory experience	Sights, sounds, tastes, and feelings you might notice during this procedure.
 Flexibility tip	Times or steps where things might vary. It is okay if your experience is a little different.

1. Routine Cleaning

What is this visit for?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Getting your teeth and gums cleaned to keep your mouth healthy.
Why is this needed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Removes sticky buildup (plaque) and hard buildup (tartar) from teeth.• Helps prevent cavities and gum disease.• Keeps your mouth healthy.
What will happen?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• You sit in the dental chair.• A dental hygienist cleans your teeth using special tools.• They gently scrape away sticky buildup (plaque) and hard buildup (tartar).• A spinning toothbrush, louder than one you use at home — is used to make your teeth smooth and shiny (polishing).• Your mouth is rinsed with water.• Sometimes a tooth-strengthening mineral called fluoride is placed on your teeth.• Your dental team may personalize the visit for you — for example, adjusting the chair position, using different tools, or taking more breaks.
How long will the procedure take?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Usually 30–90 minutes for the procedure itself. Your overall visit time may be longer.•  Flexibility tip: Times are estimates only. Your visit may be shorter or longer depending on your needs. It is okay if it takes a different amount of time. Check in with your dental team before you leave.
What happens after?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Most people can eat and drink right away (eating and drinking in the way that works for them).• Your mouth may feel clean or a little sensitive for a short time.• Ask your dentist if there is anything specific you should do or avoid after your visit.• Routine cleanings usually happen at least every 6 months, though some people go more often.

1. Routine Cleaning (Continued)



**Sensory
experience /
What you may
notice**




- **Sight:** There will be a bright light above you.
- **Sound:** You may hear scraping, buzzing from the spinning brush, and water suction.
- **Touch:** You may feel pressure, vibration, and the hygienist's gloved hands in your mouth.
- **Taste:** You may taste a minty or soapy flavor from the toothpaste or fluoride.
- **Position:** You will be leaning back in the chair.







**You are in
control**

- You can ask to pause or stop at any time.
- Raise your hand if you need a break.
- Talk with your dental team beforehand about a signal you can use (like raising two fingers).
- If you use an AAC device or communicate in a different way, let your team know before your visit so they can support you.




2. Filling for a Cavity

What is this visit for?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting a cavity (a small hole in a tooth) fixed.
Why is this needed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A tooth has become unhealthy because of extra germs. • Without this procedure, the cavity can get bigger and cause pain. • A filling helps the tooth stay healthy.
What will happen?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The dentist makes the area around your tooth numb so it will not hurt (see Anesthesia in the Glossary on the back of this guide). • A small spinning tool is used to clean the unhealthy part of the tooth. • The clean space is fixed and shaped so it feels like a tooth. • Your dental team may personalize the visit for you.
How long will the procedure take?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually 30–60 minutes for the procedure. •  Flexibility tip: The time can vary. If your cavity is larger, it may take a little longer.
What happens after?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid chewing in that area until the numb feeling wears off (usually a few hours). You may notice mild sensitivity for a few days — this is normal. If pain or sensitivity continues or gets worse, contact your dental office.
 Sensory experience / What you may notice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Touch: You may feel pressure and vibration — this is normal. Tell your team if you feel sharp pain. • Sound: You will hear buzzing from the spinning tool. • Taste: You may taste a slight chemical or neutral taste. • Numbness: The numb feeling (tingling or heaviness) may last for a few hours after the appointment.
 You are in control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You can ask to pause or stop at any time. • Raise your hand if you need a break. • Talk with your dental team beforehand about a signal you can use (like raising two fingers). • If you use an AAC device or communicate in a different way, let your team know before your visit so they can support you.




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How long will the procedure take?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually 30–60 minutes for the procedure. •  Flexibility tip: The time can vary. If your cavity is larger, it may take a little longer.
What happens after?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid chewing in that area until the numb feeling wears off (usually a few hours). • You may notice mild sensitivity for a few days — this is normal. • If pain or sensitivity continues or gets worse, contact your dental office. •  Flexibility tip: Your dentist will tell you if there is anything special to do or avoid. Always follow their instructions over what is written here.
 Sensory experience / What you may notice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Touch: You may feel pressure and vibration — this is normal. Tell your team if you feel sharp pain. • Sound: You will hear buzzing from the spinning tool. • Taste: You may taste a slight chemical or neutral taste. • Numbness: The numb feeling (tingling or heaviness) may last for a few hours after the appointment.
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3. Tooth Removal (Extraction)

What is this visit for?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having a tooth taken out.
Why is this needed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The tooth is too unhealthy or damaged to be saved. • Removing it can stop pain and protect other teeth.
What will happen?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The dentist makes the area numb so you will not feel pain. • Special tools are used to gently move the tooth back and forth to loosen it. • When the tooth is loose, it is removed. • You bite on cotton or gauze to help stop bleeding. • Your dental team may personalize the visit for you.
How long will the procedure take?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually 20–60 minutes, depending on the tooth. •  Flexibility tip: Some teeth take longer to remove. Your team will keep you informed.
What happens after?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eat soft foods for a few days while your mouth heals. • Do not rinse, spit, or use a straw for the first 24 hours. • Follow all instructions from your dental team carefully. • Call your dental office if you have heavy bleeding, severe pain, or signs of infection.
 Sensory experience / What you may notice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Touch: You will feel pressure and movement — but not pain. If you feel pain, tell your team right away. • Sound: You may hear clicking or popping sounds as the tooth is loosened. • Taste: You may taste a small amount of blood. • Position: You will be leaning back in the chair.
 You are in control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You can ask to pause or stop at any time. • Raise your hand if you need a break. • Talk with your dental team beforehand about a signal you can use (like raising two fingers). • If you use an AAC device or communicate in a different way, let your team know before your visit so they can support you.




4. Root Canal

What is this visit for?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Treating the inside of a tooth that is infected or in pain.
Why is this needed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inside each tooth is soft tissue called pulp. When pulp becomes infected, it can cause significant pain.• A root canal removes the infected pulp and saves the tooth.• Without treatment, the infection can spread.
What will happen?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The dentist makes your tooth numb.• A small opening is made in the top of the tooth.• The infected pulp (soft tissue inside the tooth) is carefully removed.• The inside of the tooth is cleaned and disinfected.• The empty space is filled with a special material.• At a later visit, you may need a crown to protect the tooth.• Your dental team may personalize the visit for you.
How long will the procedure take?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Usually 60–90 minutes. Some root canals require more than one visit.•  Flexibility tip: This procedure can vary a lot in length. Your dentist will give you an estimate beforehand. It is okay if it takes longer than planned.
What happens after?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• You may have some tenderness or mild pain for a few days — this is normal.• Take any medicines your dentist recommends or prescribes.• Avoid chewing on that side until the final crown or filling is placed.• Contact your dental office if pain is severe or getting worse.
 Sensory experience / What you may notice	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Touch: You will feel pressure but should not feel sharp pain. Tell your team immediately if you do.• Sound: You will hear buzzing and suction sounds.• Taste: You may taste a slight bitter or medicinal flavor.• Position: You will be leaning back and may have instruments in your mouth for an extended time.
 You are in control	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• You can ask to pause or stop at any time.• Raise your hand if you need a break.• Talk with your dental team beforehand about a signal you can use (like raising two fingers).• If you use an AAC device or communicate in a different way, let your team know before your visit so they can support you.




5. Crown

What is this visit for?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting a cover placed over a tooth to protect it.
Why is this needed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A crown protects a tooth that is cracked, weak, or has had a root canal. • It helps your tooth stay strong and work normally.
What will happen?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The dentist shapes the tooth so the crown will fit correctly. • Pictures or molds are taken of your teeth. • You receive a temporary crown to protect the tooth while waiting. • A lab makes your permanent crown. • At a second visit, the dentist removes the temporary crown and places the permanent one. • The crown is secured in place. • Your dental team may personalize the visit for you.
How long will the procedure take?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually 60–90 minutes per visit. Two visits are typically needed. •  Flexibility tip: The second visit is usually scheduled a few weeks after the first. Timing can vary.
What happens after?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid sticky or hard foods on the temporary crown. • The permanent crown may feel slightly different at first — this usually settles within a few days. • Contact your dental team if the crown feels very off or if you have pain.
 Sensory experience / What you may notice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Touch: You will feel pressure during shaping and placement. • Sound: You will hear drilling and buzzing sounds. • Taste: You may taste a slightly bitter flavor from dental materials. • Note: The temporary crown may feel slightly different in your mouth — this is normal.
 You are in control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You can ask to pause or stop at any time. • Raise your hand if you need a break. • Talk with your dental team beforehand about a signal you can use (like raising two fingers). • If you use an AAC device or communicate in a different way, let your team know before your visit so they can support you.

6. Bridge

What is this visit for?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Replacing one or more missing teeth with a connected set of artificial teeth.
Why is this needed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A bridge fills the space left by missing teeth. It helps you chew and speak comfortably. It prevents other teeth from shifting.
What will happen?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The teeth on each side of the gap are shaped to hold the bridge. Molds or digital images are taken of your teeth. You receive a temporary bridge while the permanent one is being made. A lab creates the bridge, which includes crowns for the side teeth and a replacement tooth in the middle. At a second visit, the permanent bridge is placed and secured. Your dental team may personalize the visit for you.
How long will the procedure take?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Usually two visits of 60–90 minutes each.  Flexibility tip: Wait time between visits for the lab to make the bridge is usually a few weeks.
What happens after?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Care for the bridge as instructed by your dental team. Floss carefully around the bridge — your team will show you how. It may take a short time to get used to eating with the bridge in place.
 Sensory experience / What you may notice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Touch: Shaping the teeth will feel similar to getting a crown — pressure and vibration. Sound: You will hear drilling sounds. Taste: You may taste dental materials during the procedure.
 You are in control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You can ask to pause or stop at any time. Raise your hand if you need a break. Talk with your dental team beforehand about a signal you can use (like raising two fingers). If you use an AAC device or communicate in a different way, let your team know before your visit so they can support you.

7. Dental Implant

What is this visit for?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Replacing a missing tooth with a permanent artificial tooth.
Why is this needed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A dental implant is the closest thing to a natural tooth. It helps you chew, speak, and smile comfortably. It also protects your jawbone.
What will happen?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Step 1 — A surgeon places a small metal post (like a tiny screw) into your jawbone. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You then wait several months for the bone to grow around the post and hold it firmly. This is called healing. Step 2 — After healing, a small connector piece is attached to the post. Step 3 — A crown (replacement tooth) is placed on top of the connector. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The implant looks and works like a natural tooth. Your dental team may personalize the process for you.
How long will the procedure take?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The full process usually takes 3–6 months or longer across multiple visits.  Flexibility tip: Healing time varies from person to person. Your timeline may be shorter or longer. This is expected and okay.
What happens after?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Follow all care instructions after surgery carefully. Eat soft foods during healing periods. Attend all follow-up appointments. Once placed, care for the implant like a natural tooth — brushing and flossing daily.
 Sensory experience / What you may notice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Touch: The surgical step involves pressure and may involve some post-procedure soreness. Position: You will be leaning back during procedures. Note: Healing between steps can take several months — this is completely normal.
 You are in control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You can ask to pause or stop at any time. Raise your hand if you need a break. Talk with your dental team beforehand about a signal you can use (like raising two fingers). If you use an AAC device or communicate in a different way, let your team know before your visit so they can support you.