

Tips for Choosing a Dentist

Is a Dentist a Doctor?

Yes, but in dentistry, not medicine. Dentists undergo extensive professional training, just like medical doctors. They are licensed practitioners with a doctor of dental surgery (D.D.S) or a doctor of dental medicine (D.M.D) degree, and they can specialize in specific areas of care such as orthodontics or pediatric dentistry. Dentists examine and treat teeth, gums, and jaw. A thorough dental examination will include inspection of the tongue, lips, inside of the mouth, the skin of the face and neck, plus a gentle feeling of the neck for enlarged nodes or glands. Recent studies indicate a strong correlation between dental health and overall health. For example, untreated periodontal (mouth and gum) infections are often found in people with heart disease.

Knowing your dentist's credentials (background, training, and specializations) is critical to obtaining quality dental care. Some dentists are members of the American Dental Association (ADA). This tells you that your dentist (as an ADA member) is committed to high ethical standards of conduct and to ongoing professional training and research.

If you are selecting a dentist for the first time, asking your family physician for a referral is a good place to start. Also, your physician may be the first to recognize a potential problem and can advise on area dentists with appropriate training or background. There should be a local dental society in your area, and you can call for names of dentists and their credentials. Once you are established with a dentist, he/she will refer you to appropriate dental specialists, as your dental problems will change over time.

What Are Some of the Specialties and Is That Important?

- Dental Public Health – Prevention and control of dental disease and promotion of dental health
- Endodontics – Prevention and treatment of diseases of the root and related structures (root canal therapy)
- Oral and maxillofacial pathology – Diagnosis and treatment of tumors and other diseases including injuries of the head and neck
- Oral and maxillofacial surgery – Tooth extractions and surgical treatment of diseases, injuries, and defects of the mouth, jaw, and face
- Orthodontics and dentofacial orthopedics – Diagnosis and treatment of tooth and facial irregularities or deformities
- Pediatric dentistry – Dental care of infants and children
- Periodontics – Treatment of diseases of the gums and related structures
- Prosthodontics – Treatment of oral problems with prosthetic devices like crowns, bridges, and dentures



If I Don't Like What My Dentist Is Suggesting, What Do I Do?

You and your dentist need to discuss all your concerns, which will include knowing what the options are for each problem identified. You also need to feel comfortable talking to your dentist before and after every dental examination. You can always get a second opinion or comparison from another dentist. It is important that you agree on your treatment plan and options. It is also important for you and your dentist to understand just how much dental care you can afford. Most dentists understand there are limits of your insurance program or self-pay and will work with you in establishing affordable fees and payment plans.