When to See a Dental Specialist | Core Dental

Canonical: https://www.coredental.com.au/consult-specialist-dental-problem/

Details:

Your general dentist is usually your first point of contact for any dental problem or regular check-up. They assess your oral health and develop a care plan to suit you. A general dentist may refer you to a specialist when a problem is more complex and falls outside the scope of general dentistry, so you receive the care you need. At Core Dental our dentists work alongside registered specialists across our clinics.

Who should you see first for a dental problem?

Start with a general dentist. They carry out a thorough assessment of your teeth, gums, bite and general oral health, request imaging when it is clinically appropriate and explain what is happening. Many problems, such as check-ups, cleans, fillings and extractions, can be treated by your general dentist without a referral.

If your dentist thinks a problem needs additional training or equipment, they will talk to you about a referral. At Core Dental we plan care with the input of our dentists, hygienists and specialists, so you do not need to work out the pathway on your own.

When would a general dentist refer you to a specialist?

A referral is usually suggested when a problem is complex, needs advanced treatment techniques or involves a particular area of the mouth, jaw or bite. Examples include:

a tooth that may need complex root canal treatment

gum disease or gum recession that needs specialist management

crooked teeth or a bite problem that may need orthodontic treatment

complex tooth replacement involving dentures, crowns, bridges or implants

impacted wisdom teeth, oral lesions or jaw problems

children who need dental care tailored to their age or needs

Your dentist makes the recommendation after examining you, and you decide with them what is right for you.

What does each type of dental specialist do?

Specialist dentists are qualified dentists who have completed additional formal training in their chosen field beyond their general dental degree. They are registered with AHPRA, the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency, and the Dental Board of Australia, and you can check a practitioner's registration on the AHPRA register at ahpra.gov.au.

Endodontist. A root canal specialist who deals with the pulp (nerve) of the tooth. See endodontics .

Periodontist. A gum specialist who treats and manages periodontal disease, gum recession and other disorders of the supporting tissues of the teeth. See periodontics .

Prosthodontist. A specialist in restoring natural teeth and replacing missing teeth with dentures, crowns, bridges and implant crowns. See prosthodontics .

Orthodontist. A specialist in moving teeth to correct bite and alignment, using braces, Invisalign or removable appliances. See orthodontics .

Paediatric dentist. A specialist who provides dental treatment for children from birth through adolescence, including those with special needs. See paediatric dentistry .

Oral and maxillofacial surgeon. A specialist who performs wisdom tooth extractions and implant surgery, treats oral lesions and performs jaw surgery. See oral and maxillofacial surgery .

Not every specialty is available at every clinic. Our team can tell you which of our clinics offers the specialist you need.

How does a referral work?

When specialist care is recommended, your general dentist provides a referral and the details you need to see the specialist. If the specialist works at one of our clinics, our team can help you arrange a time. Specialist sessions are limited and can change, so confirm the next available session when you book. Please bring your referral, any recent X-rays and a list of your medicines.

What should you ask before seeing a specialist?

It helps to ask:

What is the recommended approach intended to achieve?

Are there reasonable alternatives?

What does preparation and aftercare involve?

What risks or limitations apply?

How long will treatment take, and what will it cost?

Treatment time, fees, recovery and maintenance vary with the diagnosis and complexity of care. We provide a written treatment plan with fees before treatment starts, so you can compare stages, appointments and payment arrangements before you decide.

Call 000 immediately for uncontrollable bleeding, difficulty breathing or swallowing, serious facial injury or other life-threatening symptoms. For severe tooth pain or swelling without these signs, contact us promptly.

The thirteen specialties, and which problem goes to which

"See a specialist" is only useful if you know which one. Australia has a closed list of recognised dental specialties, and the published advice maps several common problems onto them.

The list. The Dental Board of Australia: "There are 13 dental specialties in Australia which are approved by the Australian Health Workforce Ministerial Council (the Ministerial Council)." They are "dento-maxillofacial radiology", "endodontics", "forensic odontology", "oral and maxillofacial surgery", "oral medicine", "oral and maxillofacial pathology", "oral surgery", "orthodontics", "paediatric dentistry", "periodontics", "prosthodontics", "public health dentistry (community dentistry)" and "special needs dentistry".

Thirteen, and no others. A practitioner cannot be a registered specialist in something not on that list.

Which problem goes where, from the published advice.

Root canal treatment. "All dentists are trained to carry out root canal treatments. Some dentists will refer complicated and emergency cases to an endodontist once your tooth has been assessed. Endodontists are dentists who are specialists in root canal treatment." And: "If you would like a specialist opinion, ask your dentist for a referral to an endodontist."

Tooth alignment and bite. "Orthodontic treatment is provided by an orthodontist, and some dentists. An orthodontist is a specialist dentist who has done extra study in this area." The Department elsewhere describes an orthodontist as "a dentist who has done additional study to specialise in the diagnosis, prevention and treatment of problems in the alignment of teeth and jaws".

Restoring or replacing teeth. "For more complicated cases you may also be referred to a prosthodontist - a dentist with additional training in restoring teeth." Dentures too: they "can be made for you by a dentist, dental prosthetist (advanced dental technician) or specialist prosthodontist".

Surgery of the jaws and face. "An oral maxillofacial surgeon who is trained in surgery of the teeth, bone, jaw and face." On wisdom teeth: these "can be removed by a dentist, but may also need to be referred to an oral maxillofacial surgeon who has done additional training and study in surgery or the teeth, bones, jaws and face."

Persistent mouth ulcers. "If ulcers are interfering with your normal daily activities, or have persisted for more than 2 weeks, see your dentist or an Oral Medicine Specialist dentist."

Difficulty tolerating treatment. The Department lists "a specialist in special needs dentistry" among the places to get help with dental anxiety and phobia.

Sources: Dental Board of Australia, Specialist Registration, dentalboard.gov.au (the page states it was reviewed 18/03/2025); Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Root canal treatment, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 14 July 2025); Orthodontic treatment, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 15 December 2025); Teeth - gapped teeth, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 1 July 2025); Dentures, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 4 August 2026); Wisdom teeth, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (the page states its review date as 3 June 2022); Mouth ulcers, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 13 October 2025); Dental anxiety and phobia, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 22 October 2025). All accessed 6 November 2026.

What "specialist" requires, and how to check it

The word is doing legal work, and the requirements behind it are published — as is the register that lets you verify any claim.

What the Board requires. "All applicants for specialist registration must be qualified and meet the requirements set out in the Board's Specialist registration standard. These requirements include that applicants have: completed a minimum of two years general dental practice (this requirement may be achieved by experience outside Australia, subject to assessment and approval by the Board), and met all other requirements for general registration as a dentist."

Two years of general practice before specialising, as a minimum. And the experience "may be achieved by experience outside Australia, subject to assessment and approval by the Board".

One specialty has an additional requirement that no other does. "Oral and maxillo-facial surgery is a specialty recognised by both the Dental Board of Australia and the Medical Board of Australia. You must hold qualifications in both medicine and dentistry."

Both medicine and dentistry. That is published, and it is the reason this specialty sits differently from the rest.

There is a recognised route from New Zealand. "A practitioner who is registered with the Dental Council (New Zealand) as a dental specialist and holds a current annual practising certificate for this specialty is entitled to registration with the Board if that specialty exists in Australia."

And how to verify any of it. "Ahpra publishes an online register of all dental practitioners that provides the profession and the public with up-to-date information about a dental practitioner's registration status. This register also includes details of the specialty or specialties for dentists who hold specialist registration."

Public, current, and the only authoritative answer to "is this person really a specialist in that".

Where a specialist opinion is a normal step, not a sign of trouble. The published advice treats referral as routine. On root canal treatment: some dentists "will refer complicated and emergency cases to an endodontist once your tooth has been assessed". On gaps: "You may be referred to an orthodontist", and "for more complicated cases you may also be referred to a prosthodontist ... or even an oral maxillofacial surgeon". And for complex cosmetic plans: "If it is a complex procedure, you may need time to think about your options, or see specialists over multiple visits."

You can also ask. The Department's root canal page puts it as an entitlement rather than a request: "If you would like a specialist opinion, ask your dentist for a referral to an endodontist."

What should happen either way. "If there's a problem, your dentist will explain the treatment options and give you an estimate of the cost and the time it will take." And on any plan: "Once you are happy with the care plan, treatment can begin. If you are not happy with the care plan or do not understand it, it is important to let your dental practitioner know."

On where registration is held , it is with the Dental Board through Ahpra — which is why the Ahpra register is the place to verify a specialty, and why no college or association membership is a substitute for it.

And if you have a concern about care you have received , there is a published avenue: "If people have concerns about the dental care they are receiving, they should contact the clinic which provided the care or the Health Complaints Commissioner."

Sources: Dental Board of Australia, Specialist Registration, dentalboard.gov.au (the page states it was reviewed 18/03/2025); Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Root canal treatment, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 14 July 2025); Teeth - gapped teeth, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 1 July 2025); Cosmetic dentistry and teeth whitening, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 12 December 2025); Dental treatment, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 3 June 2026); Victorian Department of Health, Access to Victoria's public dental care services, health.vic.gov.au . All accessed 6 November 2026.

Frequently asked questions

Do I need a referral to see a specialist?

In most cases your general dentist will recommend a specialist and provide a referral with the details. At Core Dental our team can help you arrange the appointment. Ask our booking team about referral requirements for the specialty you need.

Are all dental specialists registered?

Specialist dentists hold specialist registration with the Dental Board of Australia, and you can check any practitioner on the national register of health practitioners. We encourage you to check before treatment begins.

Can I see a specialist at my local Core Dental clinic?

Some specialists work at selected clinics on set days, and availability can change. Call 13 13 16 and we will tell you which clinic and session suits you.

Will my general dentist stay involved?

Usually yes. Your general dentist coordinates your overall care and may continue your routine check-ups and cleans while a specialist treats the specific problem.

How many dental specialties are there in Australia?

Thirteen. The Dental Board of Australia: "There are 13 dental specialties in Australia which are approved by the Australian Health Workforce Ministerial Council (the Ministerial Council)."

What are they?

"Dento-maxillofacial radiology", "endodontics", "forensic odontology", "oral and maxillofacial surgery", "oral medicine", "oral and maxillofacial pathology", "oral surgery", "orthodontics", "paediatric dentistry", "periodontics", "prosthodontics", "public health dentistry (community dentistry)" and "special needs dentistry".

Who do I see about a root canal?

Usually your own dentist. "All dentists are trained to carry out root canal treatments. Some dentists will refer complicated and emergency cases to an endodontist once your tooth has been assessed."

Who do I see about crooked teeth?

"Orthodontic treatment is provided by an orthodontist, and some dentists. An orthodontist is a specialist dentist who has done extra study in this area."

Who do I see about replacing teeth?

A prosthodontist for complex cases — "a dentist with additional training in restoring teeth". Dentures "can be made for you by a dentist, dental prosthetist (advanced dental technician) or specialist prosthodontist".

Who do I see about jaw surgery or wisdom teeth?

An oral and maxillofacial surgeon, "trained in surgery of the teeth, bone, jaw and face". Wisdom teeth "can be removed by a dentist, but may also need to be referred" to one.

Who do I see about a mouth ulcer that will not heal?

"If ulcers are interfering with your normal daily activities, or have persisted for more than 2 weeks, see your dentist or an Oral Medicine Specialist dentist."

Is there a specialty for people who find treatment very difficult?

Special needs dentistry, which is on the Board's list of thirteen. The Department lists "a specialist in special needs dentistry" among the places to get help with dental anxiety and phobia.

What does specialist registration require?

Applicants must "meet the requirements set out in the Board's Specialist registration standard", including having "completed a minimum of two years general dental practice ... and met all other requirements for general registration as a dentist".

Which specialty has an extra requirement?

Oral and maxillofacial surgery. "Oral and maxillo-facial surgery is a specialty recognised by both the Dental Board of Australia and the Medical Board of Australia. You must hold qualifications in both medicine and dentistry."

How can I check someone is a registered specialist?

On the public register. "Ahpra publishes an online register of all dental practitioners ... This register also includes details of the specialty or specialties for dentists who hold specialist registration."

Does a referral mean something is seriously wrong?

Not usually — the published advice treats it as routine for complex cases, and you can ask for one: "If you would like a specialist opinion, ask your dentist for a referral to an endodontist."

What should I be told before treatment?

"If there's a problem, your dentist will explain the treatment options and give you an estimate of the cost and the time it will take." And if a plan is unclear: "If you are not happy with the care plan or do not understand it, it is important to let your dental practitioner know."

What if I have a concern about care I received?

"If people have concerns about the dental care they are receiving, they should contact the clinic which provided the care or the Health Complaints Commissioner."

Related services and further reading

Specialist care

Our dentists and registered specialists

Why seeing a registered specialist matters

Should my child see a paediatric dentist or general dentist?

Orthodontics at Core Dental

Root canal treatment

Dental crowns

Understanding your treatment

How can we help?

If you are unsure whether you need a general dentist or a specialist, start with a conversation. Call 13 13 16 or book online and our team can arrange an examination at the clinic nearest you. You can also

read about what to expect at your first Core Dental appointment .

Core Dental at a glance

Nine Core Dental clinics across Melbourne: Southbank, South Melbourne, Caroline Springs, Carrum Downs, Epping, Wyndham, Berwick, Bayside and Glenferrie.

Open six days a week: Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm and Saturday mornings.

We quote before treatment starts and offer interest-free payment plans, with HICAPS on-site claiming.

Call 13 13 16 or book online.

Contact Core Dental

Phone	13 13 16
Booking	Online via coredental.com.au, or call 13 13 16
Hours	Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm, Saturday 8.00am to 1.30pm (Bayside Saturday 8.30am to 1.30pm), Sunday closed
Clinics	Southbank , South Melbourne , Caroline Springs , Carrum Downs , Epping , Wyndham , Berwick , Bayside , Glenferrie

Results, recovery times and potential risks vary for each individual. This information is general in nature and is intended for people over 18. Seek advice from a qualified, AHPRA-registered practitioner before proceeding.

Who is the first person to see for a dental problem?

Your general dentist is usually the first point of contact. At Core Dental our dentists assess your oral health, treat what they can and refer you to a registered specialist when a problem is complex.

What does an endodontist do?

An endodontist is a root canal specialist who deals with the pulp (nerve) of the tooth. Core Dental dentists may refer you to one when a root canal needs specialist management.

What does a prosthodontist specialise in?

A prosthodontist restores natural teeth and replaces missing teeth with prosthetics such as dentures, crowns, bridges and implant crowns. Core Dental dentists may recommend one for complex restorative work.

What does an oral and maxillofacial surgeon do?

An oral and maxillofacial surgeon performs wisdom tooth extractions and implant surgery, treats oral lesions and performs jaw surgery. Your Core Dental dentist will explain whether a referral suits your situation.

What is a periodontist responsible for?

A periodontist is a gum specialist who treats and manages periodontal disease, gum recession and other disorders of the supporting tissues of the teeth. Core Dental dentists refer gum problems that need specialist care.

What does an orthodontist do?

An orthodontist is a specialist in moving teeth to correct bite and alignment, using braces, Invisalign or removable appliances. Core Dental offers orthodontic care through its dentists and registered specialists.

What is a paediatric dentist?

A paediatric dentist is a specialist who provides dental treatment for children from birth through adolescence, including those with special needs. Core Dental can advise which clinic suits your child.

What training do specialist dentists have?

Specialist dentists have completed additional formal training in their field beyond their general dental degree and are registered with AHPRA and the Dental Board of Australia. You can check any practitioner on the AHPRA register.

How do I book a specialist appointment at Core Dental?

Call 13 13 16 or book online at coredental.com.au. Tell our team what you need and bring your referral, and we will confirm which clinic and session suits you.