Hygienist and Dentist: Do You Need Both? | Core Dental

Canonical: https://www.coredental.com.au/should-i-see-hygienist-as-well-as-dentist/

Details:

Yes, seeing both a dental hygienist and a dentist is generally recommended as part of a complete oral health routine. Their roles overlap in some areas, but each plays a distinct part. A hygienist focuses on prevention, education and the health of your gums and the tissues that support your teeth, while a dentist diagnoses and treats a broader range of dental conditions. At Core Dental our dentists and hygienists work together, so your whole mouth is looked after.

What is the difference between a dental hygienist and a dentist?

Dental hygienists have training that focuses on prevention, education and the maintenance of periodontal health. Periodontal health covers the gums, the ligaments that hold your teeth in place, the bone, and the outer surfaces of the tooth roots.

Dentists, by contrast, diagnose and treat a broader range of dental conditions, such as decay, damaged teeth, missing teeth and bite problems. A general dentist may also refer you to a hygienist so that the two practitioners can work together to make sure your whole mouth is healthy. At Core Dental our clinical team includes dentists, hygienists and registered specialists, and we use each practitioner's skills when planning your care.

What does a dental hygienist do?

A dental hygienist carries out a range of preventive duties, which may include:

Scaling and polishing , which removes soft plaque and hard deposits such as tartar.

Stain removal , which removes extrinsic marks on the surface of the teeth.

Intra-oral X-rays , which help to diagnose tooth and gum disease.

Diet analysis , where the hygienist talks with you about the risks that certain foods and drinks pose to your teeth.

Oral hygiene instruction , where you learn the tools and techniques that suit your teeth and gums so that you can build a personalised routine.

Fluoride applications , which help to strengthen teeth.

Fissure sealing , which fills the deep grooves in teeth to help prevent decay.

Which of these you need depends on your mouth, and your dentist or hygienist will explain the plan for you.

How often should you see a hygienist?

Many people are advised to see a hygienist about every six months, alongside regular check-ups with their dentist. That interval is a general guide. Some people, for example those with gum disease or a higher risk of decay, may be advised to visit more often, and others less often. Your dentist will recommend a schedule based on your individual oral health risks rather than assuming everyone is the

same.

How long does a hygiene appointment take?

A typical hygiene appointment takes about 40 minutes, although the time varies with your needs. During the visit your hygienist assesses your oral hygiene and dental health and carries out a professional clean. You can read more about what happens in our article on what a hygiene appointment involves .

Why do a hygienist and a dentist work well together?

The two roles complement each other. At a check-up your dentist looks at the whole mouth, checks for decay, damaged teeth and other conditions, and decides whether any treatment is needed. A hygienist concentrates on keeping your gums healthy and your teeth clean, and on helping you look after them at home. Together this supports prevention, which usually means simpler treatment if a problem does appear.

If you have gum disease that needs more advanced care, your dentist can discuss whether you would benefit from seeing a registered periodontist. You can read about periodontics on our website.

What should you do before your appointment?

When you book, tell us about any concerns, such as bleeding gums, sensitivity or bad breath, and bring relevant medical information and a list of your current medicines. This helps your practitioner plan your visit. Ask what the recommended approach is meant to achieve, what alternatives exist and how often you should return.

At Core Dental we quote before treatment starts, and we offer interest-free payment plans, with terms that apply. HICAPS claiming is available on site, so you can claim your health fund rebate at the clinic where your cover allows.

A hygienist is a registered practitioner in their own right

The question behind this page is often whether seeing a hygienist is a lesser version of seeing a dentist. It is not, and the regulatory position explains why.

The Dental Board of Australia: "dental hygienists, dental therapists, and oral health therapists are divisions of dental practitioners." They hold their own registration, not a delegated permission — and the title is protected: "you can only use the protected title of dental hygienist if you are registered in that division."

They are held to the same standard as everyone else, too: "dental hygienists, dental therapists, and oral health therapists must adhere to the same Scope of practice registration standard as all other divisions of dental practitioners."

One overlap worth knowing, because it explains why the person you see may hold a different title than you expected: "a registered oral health therapist is considered qualified to practise as dental therapist and/or dental hygienist." The Board also notes a practitioner "can apply for registration and renew your registration in multiple divisions."

So the honest answer to "should I see a hygienist as well as a dentist" is that these are different registrations with different scopes, not a hierarchy — and which of them you need depends on what your mouth needs rather than on which is more senior.

Any practitioner's registration division and status can be checked on the public register at ahpra.gov.au, which is the reliable way to confirm a title rather than inferring it.

Source: Dental Board of Australia, Dental hygienist, dental therapist and oral health therapist, dentalboard.gov.au (page reviewed 18 March 2025; accessed 4 November 2026).

Why you should ask about the clinician, not the job title

Here is the part of the regulation that most changes how you should think about booking, and it is rarely explained to patients.

The Dental Board: "your scope of practice depends on your education, qualifications, training, experience, and competence." And then, explicitly: " this means that even within a division, your scope may vary from another practitioner's. You should not rely on your scope being the same as a colleagues, as your training, experience and competence may be different from theirs. "

Two hygienists with the same registration can properly do different things. The title tells you which division someone is registered in; it does not tell you the boundaries of what that individual is educated, trained and competent to do.

The practical consequence is that the useful question is never "can a hygienist do this?" but "can this clinician do this, and if not, who here does?" That is a reasonable thing to ask and nobody should bristle at it — it follows directly from how the standard is written.

It also explains something patients sometimes find odd: being seen by a hygienist for part of a visit and a dentist for another part, or being moved between them. That is scope working as intended, not a scheduling accident.

What this means for gum care specifically. The published prevention advice is largely about what happens daily at home — the Victorian Department of Health lists brushing "twice a day", cleaning "between teeth daily", cleaning dentures every day, quitting smoking, controlling blood sugar if you have diabetes, and avoiding sugary food and drink "especially between meals". What a practitioner adds is the part you cannot do: they "can also professionally remove plaque and hardened plaque (calculus)", which, in the Department's words, "helps the gums to attach back to the tooth".

On how often to come in, we will not publish a standard interval, because the Department does not either. Its advice is simply: "ask your oral health professional how often you should visit for a check-up." For some people that is more often than average and for others less, and it depends on risk factors such as smoking and diabetes rather than on a rule.

Sources: Dental Board of Australia, Dental hygienist, dental therapist and oral health therapist, dentalboard.gov.au (reviewed 18 March 2025); Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Gum disease, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 1 August 2025). Both accessed 4 November 2026.

Frequently asked questions

Do I still need a dentist if I see a hygienist?

Yes. A hygienist focuses on prevention and gum health, while a dentist diagnoses and treats conditions such as decay, damaged teeth and bite problems. Seeing both helps make sure nothing is missed.

Can a hygienist diagnose gum disease?

Hygienists assess gum health and can take X-rays that help to identify tooth and gum disease, and they work with your dentist, who makes the diagnosis and treatment plan. Your hygienist will tell you what they find.

Is a hygiene appointment painful?

Most people find a professional clean comfortable, although you may feel some tenderness if your gums are inflamed or your teeth are sensitive. Tell your hygienist if you feel uncomfortable so that they can adjust what they are doing.

Will a hygienist teach me how to clean my teeth?

Yes. Oral hygiene instruction is part of a hygienist's role. They can show you tools and techniques, such as flossing or interdental brushes, that suit your teeth so that you can look after your gums at home.

Is a hygienist the same as a specialist?

No. A hygienist is a registered oral health professional with training in prevention, while specialists such as periodontists complete additional specialist training. You can check any practitioner on the AHPRA register.

Is a dental hygienist a kind of assistant?

No. The Dental Board of Australia describes dental hygienists, dental therapists and oral health therapists as "divisions of dental practitioners" — they hold their own registration, and the title is protected: "you can only use the protected title of dental hygienist if you are registered in that division."

Are hygienists held to the same standards as dentists?

On scope, yes. The Board states that "dental hygienists, dental therapists, and oral health therapists must adhere to the same Scope of practice registration standard as all other divisions of dental practitioners."

Can two hygienists do different things?

Yes, and this is the part worth knowing. The Board states that "your scope of practice depends on your education, qualifications, training, experience, and competence", and that "even within a division, your scope may vary from another practitioner's". The title tells you the division, not the individual's limits — so the useful question is about the clinician rather than the job title.

Why might I see both a hygienist and a dentist in one visit?

Because their scopes differ, and some work falls to each. That is scope working as intended rather than a scheduling quirk. The Board also notes that "a registered oral health therapist is considered qualified to practise as dental therapist and/or dental hygienist", and that a practitioner may register in multiple divisions — so titles can overlap.

How often should I have a hygiene visit?

There is no published standard interval, and we will not invent one. The Victorian Department of Health's advice is to "ask your oral health professional how often you should visit for a check-up". It depends on your own risk — it lists smoking and poorly managed diabetes among the risk factors for

gum disease — rather than on a fixed gap.

Related services and further reading

Dental hygiene

Dental check-ups

What does a hygiene appointment involve?

Looking after your oral health between hygienist appointments

Do you need a deep dental cleaning?

How to keep your gums healthy

Periodontics

Dentists and registered specialists

How can we help?

If you would like to book a clean with one of our hygienists, or a check-up with one of our dentists, we can help at any of our nine practices. Call 13 13 16 or book online. You can also read more about dental check-ups .

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.

HICAPS on-site claiming, and bulk billing for eligible children under the Child Dental Benefits Schedule.

Contact Core Dental

Phone	13 13 16
Booking	Online through 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.

What is the role of a dental hygienist?

A hygienist focuses on prevention, education and the health of the gums, ligaments, bone and root surfaces that support your teeth. At Core Dental our hygienists work alongside our dentists to look after your whole mouth.

What does a hygienist do during a clean?

A hygienist scales and polishes teeth to remove plaque and tartar, removes surface stain, and may take X-rays. At Core Dental they also give diet advice, show you cleaning techniques and may apply fluoride or fissure sealants.

How often do most people see a hygienist?

Many people are advised to visit about every six months, alongside dentist check-ups, though some need more or less often. Core Dental dentists will recommend an interval based on your gum health and your risk of decay.

How long does a hygiene appointment last at Core Dental?

A typical hygiene appointment takes about 40 minutes, depending on your needs. The hygienist assesses your oral hygiene and dental health and then carries out a professional clean.

Why would my dentist refer me to a hygienist?

A general dentist may refer you so a hygienist can focus on gum health, plaque and tartar removal and home care advice. At Core Dental our dentists and hygienists share information so your treatment plan stays consistent.

Can fissure sealing be done by a hygienist?

Fissure sealing, which fills deep grooves in teeth to help prevent decay, is within a hygienist's duties. Core Dental dentists and hygienists can explain whether sealants suit you or your child.

Does Core Dental offer hygienist and dentist visits at the same clinic?

Our clinical team includes dentists, hygienists and registered specialists, and hygiene is a service across Core Dental. Ask when you book which clinic offers the appointment you need, and our team can arrange it.

How do I book a hygiene appointment at Core Dental?

Call 13 13 16 or book online at coredental.com.au. We have nine clinics across Melbourne, open Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm and Saturday mornings. Tell us whether you would like a clean, a check-up or both.