What Does a Dental Hygiene Appointment Involve? | Core Dental

Canonical: https://www.coredental.com.au/what-does-a-hygiene-appointment-involve/

Details:

Our dental hygiene appointment is a 40-minute session with a friendly hygienist, designed to assess and maintain your oral health. It begins with a medical history check to review your general health background, followed by extra-oral and intra-oral cancer screening to look for any signs of concern. Your hygienist then charts your gums, scales and cleans your teeth, and polishes them with a fluoride paste. Your needs may vary, so the steps can differ slightly between patients.

How long does a dental hygiene appointment with us last?

Our dental hygiene appointment is a 40-minute session with a hygienist. It is designed to assess and maintain your oral health, not only to clean your teeth. The time allows your hygienist to check your health history, screen for signs of concern, measure your gums, remove deposits and talk through how to look after your mouth at home.

If you need extra time because of your gum health or other needs, your hygienist or dentist will explain this and what it involves before going ahead.

What checks does the hygienist perform at the start of the appointment?

The appointment begins with a medical history check to review your general health background. Please tell us about any changes since your last visit, including new medicines, health conditions or allergies, because these can affect how we care for your teeth and gums.

Next comes extra-oral and intra-oral cancer screening. Your hygienist looks and feels around the outside of your face, head and neck, and then looks inside your mouth, to identify any signs of concern. If anything needs a closer look, your hygienist will let your dentist know so it can be assessed.

What is a periodontal chart and why is it done?

A periodontal chart is completed during the hygiene appointment to measure how healthy your gums are. Your hygienist gently uses a small measuring instrument to check the space between your teeth and gums. This helps identify whether your gums are healthy or whether disease is present, such as gingivitis or periodontal disease.

The chart gives you and your care team a record that can be compared over time. If gum disease is found, your dentist or hygienist will explain what it means and what steps may help. You can read more in our guide to what treatment of gum disease involves .

How does the hygienist clean your teeth?

Your hygienist performs a scale and clean. They use an ultrasonic scaler, which uses vibration and a water jet to remove calculus (calcified plaque) from your teeth and from beneath the gums. They then

use hand scalers to remove any remaining calculus particles that could not be reached with the ultrasonic device.

Some people notice a mild tickle or a little tenderness, particularly if their gums are inflamed. Please tell your hygienist if you are uncomfortable, and they can adjust what they are doing.

What happens after the calculus is removed?

After the calculus has been completely removed, your teeth are polished with a gritty paste containing fluoride. This removes extrinsic (surface) staining and leaves your teeth feeling smooth and fresh.

Your hygienist may also talk to you about brushing, cleaning between your teeth and anything else that suits your mouth. Our team of hygienists, dentists and specialists work together, so if your hygienist notices something that needs a dentist, they will say so.

How should you prepare for a hygiene appointment?

A useful first step is to explain your concerns, symptoms and goals when you book. Bring relevant medical information and a current medicines list. Ask what the recommended approach is intended to achieve, whether there are reasonable alternatives, and what aftercare involves. Treatment time, fees and recovery vary with each person. A written treatment plan can help you compare stages and payment arrangements before you proceed.

Call 000 immediately for uncontrollable bleeding, breathing or swallowing difficulty, serious facial injury or other life-threatening symptoms. For severe tooth pain or swelling without these emergency signs, contact us promptly. Review intervals should be tailored to your individual oral-health risks rather than assumed to be identical for every patient.

What is being removed, and why you cannot do it yourself

The appointment makes more sense once you know that two different deposits are involved, and that only one of them comes off with a toothbrush.

The Victorian Department of Health: "Professional cleaning removes built-up debris from the teeth. This may include food particles, soft plaque (bacterial growth) or hard calculus (caused by the mineral deposits from saliva onto the soft plaque, sometimes called tartar)."

So plaque is bacterial growth and soft. Calculus is what happens when minerals from your own saliva harden onto that plaque. Brushing manages the first. The second has set, and no amount of brushing shifts it — which is the whole reason a clean is a separate appointment rather than a tidy-up.

Why it matters rather than just looking better. "Plaque and calculus are the main causes of gum disease."

And what removing it does for the gums. The Department's gum disease page states the benefit directly: a practitioner "can also professionally remove plaque and hardened plaque (calculus). This helps the gums to attach back to the tooth. Early treatment of periodontitis can save affected teeth."

Helps the gums to attach back. That is a repair of sorts, and it is the clinical point of the visit.

The finish, in the Department's own description: "The dental professional then cleans and polishes your teeth using a rotating brush with a polishing paste."

Sources: Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Dental treatment, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 3 June 2026); Gum disease, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 1 August 2025). Both accessed 6 November 2026.

The parts of the visit that are not cleaning

A hygiene appointment is also a look at things a clean has nothing to do with. Knowing what they are makes the questions less surprising and the visit more useful.

You will be asked about your general health, and there is a reason. "When you go for a dental check-up, your dentist should ask questions about your general health and medications. Many health conditions have an effect on your oral health and vice versa." And specifically: "Some medicines can affect your mouth or need to be taken into consideration before dental treatment."

That is not form-filling. Around 600 drugs and medications are known to cause dry mouth, on the Department's own count, and a dry mouth changes where decay forms — "people with dry mouth ... are more prone to get decay along the gum line (tooth root surface)". A medication list can explain a pattern on your teeth that nothing else does.

The soft tissues are checked, not just the teeth. "Soft tissues in the mouth (gums, tongue, lips, cheeks and palate) are also checked for signs of oral cancer and other possible problems. Your dentist may also check your jaw joints and the lymph nodes in your neck."

Worth knowing what that check is looking for, since you see your own mouth far more often than any clinician does. The Department's oral cancer symptom list includes "a mouth ulcer that won't heal", "white or red patches in the mouth/tongue/gums", "loss of sensation anywhere in the mouth", "difficulty swallowing, moving your tongue, or moving your jaw", "loose teeth or sore gums", "altered taste" and "swollen lymph glands". Its two main risk factors are "consuming alcohol and tobacco".

Why an image may be needed. "If a suspected dental problem is difficult to see (for example, possible decay between two touching teeth, or an infection), x-rays may be needed." The decay page puts it more bluntly: "X-rays are often needed to diagnose decay as it can occur in areas not visible to the naked eye", and notes that "a tooth can appear intact from the outside" while decay shows on the image.

Preventive treatments that may be offered on the day. An oral health professional "can also provide you with care to prevent disease, such as fluoride treatments and dental sealants to prevent tooth decay". On sealants the Department is specific about where they go and what they do: "Any tooth that has deep grooves or fissures can be treated, but fissure sealants are usually placed on molars and premolars rather than front teeth", and a sealant "creates a barrier that stops food and other bacteria from collecting in the grooves of the tooth and causing decay".

If something is found. "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." Options and an estimate before anything happens.

What to raise, and the one timeframe to bring with you. If your gums have been bleeding, the Department's rule gives you something concrete to report: "Do not stop brushing if your gums are red, bleeding or puffy", and "if your gums do not improve or if they keep bleeding after four weeks, see your oral health professional." Four weeks of bleeding despite good brushing is a finding, not a complaint.

How often. The Department does not publish a universal interval. "Ask your oral health professional how often you should visit for a check-up", and separately, "ask your oral health professional how often you should have a dental check-up". Its decay page gives "every 6 to 12 months" as the window in which decay can still be caught early enough that "a filling can be avoided", and its erosion page asks for "every six to twelve months" for the same reason. The interval that suits you depends on your own risk, which is exactly what the appointment is for working out.

And the reason not to skip it when nothing hurts. "The early signs of dental disease can be difficult to see." "Having no pain does not always mean that your teeth and mouth are healthy."

Sources: Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Dental treatment, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 3 June 2026); Teeth and mouth care, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 25 July 2025); Tooth decay, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 28 June 2025); Gum disease, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 1 August 2025); Dry mouth, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 9

September 2025); Dental erosion, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 22 October 2025). All accessed 6 November 2026.

Frequently asked questions

Does a hygiene appointment hurt?

Most people find a hygiene appointment comfortable, though gums that are inflamed can feel tender and some people notice sensitivity. Tell your hygienist if anything bothers you. They can adjust their approach, and your dentist can discuss other options if needed.

What is calculus and why does it need removing?

Calculus is calcified plaque that builds up on teeth and beneath the gum line, and brushing at home cannot remove it. Your hygienist removes it with an ultrasonic scaler and hand scalers, which supports healthier gums.

Is a hygiene appointment the same as a check-up?

Not exactly. A hygiene appointment with your hygienist focuses on screening, gum measurements, scale and clean and polishing. A check-up is an examination by your dentist. Many people have both, and our team will explain what suits you.

Will my teeth look whiter after polishing?

Polishing removes surface staining, which can leave teeth looking and feeling smooth and fresh. It does not change the natural shade of your teeth. If you would like to change shade, ask us about whitening options.

How often should I book a hygiene appointment?

How often depends on your oral-health risks and the health of your gums. Your hygienist or dentist will recommend an interval that suits you, rather than one timeframe for everyone.

What is the difference between plaque and calculus?

One is soft and bacterial, the other has hardened. The Victorian Department of Health describes professional cleaning as removing "food particles, soft plaque (bacterial growth) or hard calculus (caused by the mineral deposits from saliva onto the soft plaque, sometimes called tartar)". Brushing deals with plaque; calculus has set and does not come off with a brush.

Why does removing calculus matter?

"Plaque and calculus are the main causes of gum disease." The Department also states the benefit of having it removed: a practitioner "can also professionally remove plaque and hardened plaque (calculus). This helps the gums to attach back to the tooth."

Why am I asked about my general health and medications?

Because they change what is happening in your mouth. "When you go for a dental check-up, your dentist should ask questions about your general health and medications. Many health conditions have an effect on your oral health and vice versa", and "some medicines can affect your mouth or need to be taken into consideration before dental treatment". On the Department's count, about 600 drugs and medications are known to cause dry mouth, which changes where decay forms.

What is checked besides my teeth?

"Soft tissues in the mouth (gums, tongue, lips, cheeks and palate) are also checked for signs of oral cancer and other possible problems. Your dentist may also check your jaw joints and the lymph nodes in your neck."

Why might I need an x-ray at a cleaning appointment?

Because some problems cannot be seen. "If a suspected dental problem is difficult to see (for example, possible decay between two touching teeth, or an infection), x-rays may be needed." The Department notes that "a tooth can appear intact from the outside" while decay is visible on an image.

What preventive treatments might be offered?

An oral health professional "can also provide you with care to prevent disease, such as fluoride treatments and dental sealants to prevent tooth decay". Sealants are "usually placed on molars and premolars rather than front teeth", and create "a barrier that stops food and other bacteria from collecting in the grooves of the tooth and causing decay".

Will I be told the cost before anything is done?

That is what the Department describes: "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."

My gums have been bleeding — is that worth mentioning?

Yes, and there is a timeframe that makes it concrete. "Do not stop brushing if your gums are red, bleeding or puffy", and "if your gums do not improve or if they keep bleeding after four weeks, see your oral health professional."

What does polishing actually involve?

"The dental professional then cleans and polishes your teeth using a rotating brush with a polishing paste."

How often should I have a hygiene appointment?

The Department does not set one interval for everyone: "Ask your oral health professional how often you should visit for a check-up." Its decay page gives "every 6 to 12 months" as the window in which decay can be caught early enough that "a filling can be avoided", and its erosion page asks for "every six to twelve months" for the same reason. Your own interval depends on your risk, which is part of what the appointment establishes.

Related services and further reading

Dental hygiene

Dental check-up

General dentistry

What does treatment of gum disease involve?

Top tips for children's dental hygiene

Are women more prone to oral health problems?

The benefits of Invisalign

What causes TMJ pain and how is it treated?

How can we help?

If you would like to book a hygiene appointment, our team of hygienists, dentists and specialists can see you at any of our nine Core Dental clinics. Call 13 13 16 or book online through coredental.com.au. See dental hygiene for more about what we offer.

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.

Contact Core Dental

Phone	13 13 16
Booking	Online via coredental.com.au
Hours	Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm, Saturday 8.00am to 1.30pm, Sunday closed

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.

How long is a Core Dental hygiene appointment?

A Core Dental hygiene appointment is a 40-minute session with one of our hygienists. It is designed to assess and maintain your oral health, and includes screening, gum measurements, a scale and clean and polishing.

What screening does a hygienist do at Core Dental?

Our hygienist at Core Dental begins with a medical history check, then carries out extra-oral and intra-oral cancer screening to look for any signs of concern. They let the dentist know if something needs a closer look.

What does a periodontal chart measure?

A periodontal chart measures how healthy your gums are by checking the spaces between teeth and gums. At Core Dental it helps identify whether your gums are healthy or show disease such as gingivitis or periodontal disease.

What tools does a hygienist use to remove calculus?

Our Core Dental hygienists use an ultrasonic scaler, which uses vibration and a water jet to remove calculus from teeth and beneath the gums, followed by hand scalers for any remaining particles that the ultrasonic device cannot reach.

What is used to polish teeth after a scale?

After calculus is removed, our Core Dental hygienist polishes your teeth with a gritty paste containing fluoride. This removes surface staining and leaves teeth feeling smooth and fresh.

Who performs a hygiene appointment at Core Dental?

A friendly hygienist from our clinical team performs your hygiene appointment at Core Dental. Our hygienists work alongside our dentists and specialists, so they can refer you to a dentist if they notice something that needs attention.

How do I book a hygiene appointment at Core Dental?

Call Core Dental on 13 13 16 or book online through coredental.com.au. We are open Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm and Saturday mornings across our nine Melbourne clinics.

Which Core Dental clinics offer hygiene appointments?

Hygiene appointments are available across our nine Core Dental clinics: Southbank, South Melbourne, Caroline Springs, Carrum Downs, Epping, Wyndham, Berwick, Bayside and Glenferrie. Please confirm hygienist availability when you book.