

Tooth Polishing

The colour of the teeth is cosmetically important to many people seeking dental treatment to enhance their appearance. Polishing helps achieve this by removing stains from the enamel surfaces of teeth. Clients have come to expect polishing to be part of the dental hygiene appointment. However, polishing may not always be needed. Registered dental hygienists discuss treatment options with clients and make informed decisions about polishing. Often, thorough [brushing](#) and [flossing](#) can produce the same effect as polishing.

THE SCALING PROCESS

- Scaling involves removing plaque biofilm (sticky film of bacteria) that accumulates on teeth, especially around the gumline, as well as calculus (hardened plaque) and extrinsic stains.
- Extrinsic stains appear on tooth surfaces and can usually be removed by scaling or polishing. Intrinsic stains occur inside the tooth structure and cannot be removed by scaling or polishing.
- Scaling leaves teeth clean and smooth, making it difficult for plaque biofilm and stains to accumulate.
- After scaling, registered dental hygienists may polish all of the teeth or only those with residual deposits.
- Polishing can be done using a small, motorized rubber cup filled with dental paste or with an air polisher.

ROLE OF REGISTERED DENTAL HYGIENISTS

- All polishing is provided according to the individual needs of clients.
- Registered dental hygienists select the appropriate techniques and best polishing agents to reduce stains and protect tooth surfaces.
- They educate clients on stain prevention, proper [brushing and flossing](#), and using other interdental cleaning aids and provide advice on smoking cessation and healthy eating.



CAUSES EXTRINSIC TOOTH STAINING

- Poor oral hygiene
- [Smoking](#) and [smokeless tobacco](#)
- Beverages, e.g., coffee, tea, and red wine
- Food, e.g., berries, soy sauce, and curries

PREVENTION AND HOME CARE

Based on the cause and extent of tooth staining, registered dental hygienists will develop a specific treatment plan, which may or may not include polishing. They work with clients to customize home-care programs that help control biofilm and stains.

Maintain good oral care:

- Visit a registered dental hygienist regularly for preventive oral care.
- Between visits, follow the home-care program.
- Brush twice a day with fluoridated toothpaste and a soft toothbrush.
- [Floss](#) or clean between teeth at least once a day.
- Brush or scrape the tongue daily; it can harbour harmful bacteria.
- Use a mouth rinse, if recommended by a registered dental hygienist.
- Eat a nutritious, well-balanced diet low in sugar.
- Avoid beverages, food, and products that cause staining.
- Do not smoke or use smokeless tobacco.

Registered dental hygienists are primary healthcare providers whose focus is promoting and supporting good oral health. In Ontario, dental hygiene is one of the largest regulated health professions. All dental hygienists must be registered with the College of Dental Hygienists of Ontario, which regulates the profession to ensure the public receives safe and comprehensive oral healthcare.

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