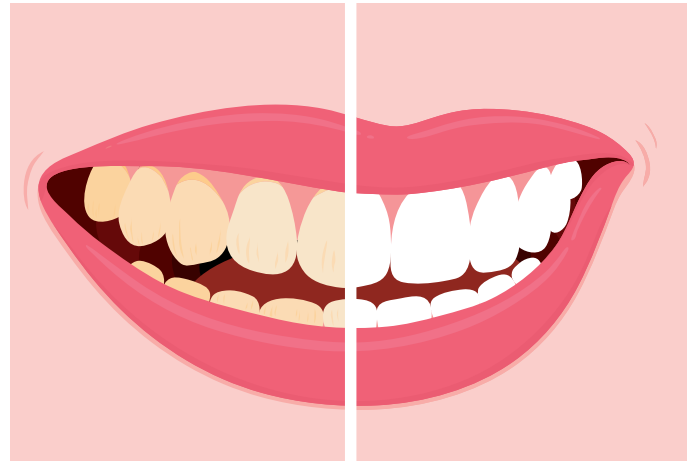


Tooth Polishing

The colour of the teeth is of particular cosmetic importance to a large number of people who seek dental treatment to improve their appearance. Polishing helps to achieve this by removing stains from the enamel surfaces of the teeth. Clients have come to expect polishing to be part of the professional scaling (cleaning) appointment, however, polishing may not always be needed. 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 removal of plaque bacteria (white, sticky substance) that accumulates on teeth, especially around the gum line, 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.
- Stains adhere to plaque, giving teeth a dull and unsightly appearance.
- Scaling leaves teeth clean and smooth, making it difficult for plaque and stains to accumulate on tooth surfaces.
- After scaling, dental hygienists may polish all of the teeth or only those with residual plaque and stain.
- Polishing can be done using a small, motorized rubber cup filled with prophylaxis (or prophy for short), dental paste or with an air polisher.

THE ROLE OF THE DENTAL HYGIENIST

- All polishing is provided according to the condition and individual needs of clients.
- Dental hygienists select the appropriate techniques and best polishing agents to reduce stains and protect tooth surfaces.
- They also educate clients on stain prevention, provide instruction on proper brushing and flossing, and recommend products that are safe and effective for personal plaque control.

CAUSES OF INTRINSIC AND EXTRINSIC TOOTH STAINING

- Poor oral hygiene
- Age
- Smoking and/or smokeless tobacco
- Beverages, e.g., coffee, tea and red wine
- Food, e.g., berries, soy sauce and curries
- Certain medications
- Dental fluorosis – swallowing too much fluoride
- Trauma to the teeth

PREVENTION AND HOME CARE

Stain removal is part of the cleaning process. Based on the cause and extent of tooth staining, 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 plaque and stains.

Maintain good oral care:

- Visit a dental hygienist regularly for professional cleanings.
- Between visits, follow the home-care program.
- Brush twice a day with fluoridated toothpaste and a soft toothbrush. (An adult should assist/supervise children until the age of 10.)
- Floss or clean between teeth at least once a day.
- Brush or scrape the tongue daily; it can harbour harmful bacteria.

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- Use a mouth rinse, if recommended by a dental professional.
- Eat a nutritious, well-balanced diet.
- Reduce sugar consumption.
- Avoid beverages, food and products that cause staining.
- Do not smoke or use smokeless tobacco.



In addition, dental hygienists:

- Provide advice on smoking cessation and healthy eating, including nutritional snacks and beverages.
- Educate clients and give instruction on effective ways to brush and floss.
- Recommend products that help reduce stain formation, e.g., whitening toothpaste, power toothbrushes.
- Remove plaque and stains from dentures and recommend cleaning products.

See fact sheets on: Tooth Staining; and Brushing, Flossing and Rinsing.

As professional health-care providers, dental hygienists are primarily concerned with promoting good oral health. Dental hygiene is among the largest of the regulated health-care professions in the province. In Ontario all dental hygienists are registered with the College of Dental Hygienists of Ontario, which regulates the profession to ensure the public receives safe and ongoing comprehensive oral care.

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