

Dentists: For More than Just Toothaches

Just as many people don't feel the need to go to the doctor unless they are sick, many also don't think about going to the dentist until they have a toothache.

Though it is definitely important to visit the dentist if you are experiencing dental pain, your dentist would very much like to see you on a regular basis, even when you aren't in pain! As they say, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," and this couldn't be truer than it is regarding dental care.

Regular dental exams play a large role in preventive health care and aren't completely about your teeth. Even people without any natural teeth should visit the dentist regularly for screenings and to determine if any adjustments to existing dentures or partials are needed.

During a dental exam, a dentist will perform several screenings:

- Face, neck, and mouth abnormalities
- Lifestyle, medical conditions, and medications that can affect your teeth
- Bite and jaw problems (like TMJ)
- Oral indications of medical issues (like diabetes or lupus)
- Oral cancer
- Overall health and oral hygiene
- Risk of tooth decay, root decay, gum or bone disease
- Need for tooth restoration or replacements
- Need for fluoride
- Denture and/or partial fit

When to Have a Dental Exam

The American Dental Association recommends that adults attend regular dental exams at intervals determined by their dentist. Attend your first preventive exam and the dentist will provide the recommended timing of your visits.

What to Expect During a Dental Exam

When you first arrive for your dental visit, you can generally expect a dental assistant or hygienist to ask you some questions about your health and dental history. If you usually experience dental anxiety, this would be a good time to mention it so it may be addressed before the exam begins.

If you are due for x-rays, they may take several types of x-rays, which will allow the dentist to see all parts of your teeth and determine if there any otherwise concealed or hidden cavities.

The dentist or hygienist may then perform the several screenings listed earlier in this article, using probes or tools to check the integrity of your teeth, look for any cavities or broken teeth, and perform measurements of your gum tissues to check for gum disease.

Cleanings and Treatment

If you possess natural teeth, the next, and equally important, part of your preventive dental visit will be a cleaning. Cleanings are typically done during the same visit as the exam, however, if it is your first time visiting a dental office, they may schedule your cleaning for a later date, after the dentist has had a chance to perform an exam.

There are different levels of depth for cleanings, and the condition of your teeth and gum tissues will determine what type and frequency of cleaning that you need. Neglecting to have your teeth cleaned can contribute to gum disease and bone loss in your jaw. Severe gum disease can result in tooth loss which, when paired with bone loss, can cause complications when trying to get dentures fitted.

During your dental exam, the dentist might also identify areas where treatment is needed. Unless severe pain is involved, you will likely need to schedule a follow-up appointment with the dentist or a dental specialist for the recommended treatment to be completed.

Need to find a dentist? Visit the [Find a Provider](#) page of the FEP Dental website to locate a dentist in your network!