

## Dental Assistant

Dental assistants greatly increase the efficiency of the dentist in the delivery of quality oral health care and are valuable members of the dental care team. If you have strong communication skills, enjoy working with your hands as well as your mind and want a career with responsibility, dental assisting is for you.

### Job Description

The duties of a dental assistant are among the most comprehensive and varied in the dental office. The dental assistant performs many tasks requiring both interpersonal and technical skills. Although state regulations vary, responsibilities may include:

- assisting the dentist during a variety of treatment procedures
- taking and developing dental radiographs (x-rays)
- asking about the patient's medical history and taking blood pressure and pulse
- serving as an infection control officer, developing infection control protocol and preparing and sterilizing instruments and equipment
- helping patients feel comfortable before, during and after dental treatment
- providing patients with instructions for oral care following surgery or other dental treatment procedures, such as the placement of a restoration (filling)
- teaching patients appropriate oral hygiene strategies to maintain oral health; (e.g., tooth brushing, flossing and nutritional counseling)
- taking impressions of patients' teeth for study casts (models of teeth)
- performing office management tasks that often require the use of a personal computer
- communicating with patients and suppliers (e.g., scheduling appointments, answering the telephone, billing and ordering supplies)
- helping to provide direct patient care in all dental specialties, including orthodontics, pediatric dentistry, periodontics and oral surgery
- [Brochure](#) (PDF)

### Career Advantages

- **Variety:** Dental assisting is a challenging and rewarding career, demanding versatility and a willingness to assume responsibility for many different tasks.
- **Flexibility:** Since dental assistants are in demand, career options include both full-time and part-time positions.
- **Excellent working conditions:** Dental offices are interesting, pleasant, people-oriented environments in which to work.
- **Personal satisfaction:** Dental assisting involves people contact, and with this personal interaction comes the personal satisfaction of knowing you've really helped someone by helping to provide a valuable health service.
- [Fact Sheet](#) (PDF)

### Opportunities

Since many dentists employ two or more dental assistants, employment opportunities in this field are excellent. The types of practice settings available to dental assistants include:

- solo dental practices (practices with only one dentist)
- group practices (practices with two or more dentists)
- specialty practices, such as oral and maxillofacial surgery (removal of teeth and correction of facial deformities), orthodontics and dentofacial orthopedics (straightening teeth with braces or other appliances), endodontics (root canal treatment), periodontics (treatment of gum problems), prosthodontics (replacement of lost teeth) and pediatric dentistry (treatment of children)
- public health dentistry, including settings such as schools and clinics which focus on the prevention of dental problems within entire communities
- hospital dental clinics, assisting dentists in the treatment of bedridden patients
- dental school clinics, assisting dental students as they learn to perform dental procedures
- Other career opportunities for dental assistants include:
  - insurance companies, processing dental insurance claims
  - vocational schools, technical institutes, community colleges dental schools and universities, teaching others to be dental assistants (which may require associate or baccalaureate college degrees)
  - dental product sales representatives

## Earning Potential

The salary of a dental assistant depends primarily upon the responsibilities associated with the specific position and the geographic location of employment. Dental assistants earn salaries equal to other health care personnel with similar training and experience such as medical assistants, physical therapy assistants, occupational therapy assistants, veterinary technicians and pharmacy assistants.

## Dental Assistant Career Video

Variety, security, flexibility and personal satisfaction are traits and attributes promoted in the video. Specific information about job responsibilities, education, training and job opportunities also are addressed.

Watch an excerpt of the video below.

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