

Dental Hygienists

SOC: 29-1292 • Career Profile Report

■ Key Facts

\$94,260 Median Salary	221,600 Employment	+7.0% Growth Rate
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■ Requirements & Salary Range

Education: Associate's degree

■ Automation Risk Assessment

Low Risk - 8.0% probability of being automated in the next 10-20 years.
This job is relatively safe from automation due to its creative, social, or complex problem-solving requirements.

■ Work-Life Balance

7.3/10 - Good work-life balance

■ Personality Fit (RIASEC)

Higher scores indicate better personality fit for this career type.

Realistic	5.4/10	Investigative	8.6/10
Artistic	4.8/10	Social	9.0/10
Enterprising	5.4/10	Conventional	6.2/10

■ Top Skills Required

Critical thinking, Communication skills, Detail oriented, Dexterity, Interpersonal skills, Problem-solving skills

✓ Strengths

- High Demand
- Flexible Work
- Continuous Learning

■ Challenges

- Burnout Risk
- Rapid Technological Change

■ What They Do

Dental Hygienists are licensed oral healthcare professionals who focus on **preventive dental care, patient education, and the early detection of oral health issues**. They work closely with dentists to help patients maintain healthy teeth and gums while reducing the risk of cavities, gum disease, and other oral conditions. Rather than performing restorative procedures, dental hygienists specialize in prevention, assessment, and long-term oral wellness.

This career is well suited for individuals who enjoy working directly with patients, value health education, and want a stable healthcare role with a strong balance of technical skill and interpersonal care.

What Do Dental Hygienists Do?

Dental hygienists provide routine preventive care and support overall dental treatment plans. Their work combines hands-on clinical tasks with patient education and documentation.

Common responsibilities include:

- Cleaning teeth by removing plaque, tartar, and stains
- Performing oral health assessments and screenings
- Taking and developing dental X-rays
- Measuring gum health and identifying signs of periodontal disease
- Applying preventive treatments such as fluoride or sealants
- Educating patients on proper brushing, flossing, and oral care habits
- Documenting patient findings and communicating with dentists

Areas of Practice

Dental hygienists may work in a variety of dental and healthcare settings:

- General Dental Practices: Routine cleanings and preventive care.
- Specialty Dental Offices: Periodontics, orthodontics, or pediatric dentistry.
- Public Health and Community Clinics: Serving underserved populations.
- Schools and Educational Programs: Teaching oral health education.
- Research and Corporate Settings: Supporting dental product development or clinical studies.

Skills and Abilities Needed

Dental hygienists must combine clinical precision with patient-focused communication.

Core Clinical Skills

Personal Qualities That Matter

Education and Licensure Pathway

Becoming a dental hygienist requires formal education and licensure:

- Accredited Dental Hygiene Program: Associate or bachelor's degree in dental hygiene
- Clinical Training: Supervised hands-on experience during the program
- Licensure Examinations: National written exam and state or regional clinical exam
- State Licensure: Required to practice legally
- Continuing Education: Ongoing learning to maintain licensure

Licensing requirements vary slightly by state but are mandatory nationwide.

Where Do Dental Hygienists Work?

Dental hygienists are employed across multiple healthcare environments:

- Dental Offices and Clinics

- Public Health Departments
- Community Health Centers
- Educational Institutions
- Research and Corporate Dental Organizations

Many positions offer part-time, full-time, or flexible scheduling options.

Is This Career Difficult?

Dental hygiene is technically demanding and physically active. Hygienists must maintain precise techniques while working in confined spaces and maintaining patient comfort. The career requires strong focus, consistency, and physical endurance, but it is generally predictable and structured compared to many healthcare roles.

Who Should Consider Becoming a Dental Hygienist?

This career may be a strong fit if you:

- Enjoy healthcare roles focused on prevention
- Like working one-on-one with patients
- Have good hand-eye coordination
- Value job stability and flexible scheduling
- Want a healthcare career without medical or dental school

How to Prepare Early

- Take high school courses in Biology and Health Sciences
- Develop strong study and time-management habits
- Practice communication and interpersonal skills
- Shadow a dental hygienist or volunteer in dental settings
- Research accredited dental hygiene programs early

Dental hygienists play a critical role in protecting oral health, preventing disease, and helping patients maintain healthy smiles throughout their lives.