

# *Dental Glossary of Terms*

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**Abrasion:** The loss of tooth structure caused by a hard toothbrush, poor brushing technique, or Bruxism (grinding or clenching the teeth).

**Abscess:** A localized infection in the bone or soft gum tissues, usually at the end of the root tip.

**Abutment:** The natural tooth that holds in place a fixed or removable bridge

**Air Abrasion:** Tiny particles of aluminum oxide blasted in a stream of water at the tooth to remove the decayed debris and ruined enamel of cavities.

**Allergy:** Unfavorable systemic response to a foreign substance or drug.

**Alveolar Bone:** The jaw bone that anchors the roots of teeth.

**Amalgam:** The most common filling material used for fillings, also referred to as mercury or silver.

**Analgesia:** A state of pain relief; an agent to lessen pain.

**Anesthesia:** Relieves the sensation of pain. See General Anesthesia, IV Sedation and Local Anesthesia.

**Anterior Teeth:** The six upper or six lower front teeth.

**Antibiotic:** A drug that stops or slows the growth of bacteria.

**Apex:** The tip of the root of a tooth.

**Apicoectomy:** The surgical removal of the root tip to treat a dead tooth.

**Arch:** Describes the alignment of the upper or lower teeth.

**Attrition:** Loss of structure due to natural wear.

**Autoclave:** A device that has a chamber where instruments are placed and steam under pressure is injected, in order to complete sterilization.

**Base:** Cement placed under a dental restoration to insulate the nerve chamber.

**Bicuspid or Pre-Molar:** Transitional teeth behind the cuspid.

**Biopsy:** Removal of a small piece of tissue for microscopic examination.

**Bite:** The way in which the upper and lower teeth meet when closing the mouth.

**Bite Wings:** Decay detection x-rays.

**Bleaching:** Chemical or laser treatment of natural teeth for whitening effect.

**Bonding:** The covering of a tooth surface with a composite resin, to correct stained or damaged teeth.

**Braces:** Devices used by Orthodontists to gradually reposition teeth.

**Bridge:** Prosthetic (false) teeth or row of teeth that spans between two natural teeth.

**Bruxism:** Involuntary, "nervous" grinding of the teeth while the patient is asleep.

**Calcium:** Chemical element needed for healthy teeth, bones and nerves.

**Calculus:** Hard residue, commonly known as "tartar", that forms on teeth due to inadequate plaque control often stained yellow or brown.

**Canker Sore:** Mouth sores appearing whitish, often with a red halo.

**Cantilever Bridge:** **Fixed bridge** that attaches to adjacent teeth only on one end.

**Cap:** Common term for dental crown (See Crown).

**Cavities:** A decay lesion or hole in a tooth.

**Clasp:** Device that holds a removable partial denture to stationary teeth.

**Cleaning:** Removal of plaque and tartar from teeth, generally above the gum line.

**Composite Filling:** A tooth-colored filling that looks like a natural tooth.

**Cosmetic Dentistry:** Treatments performed to enhance appearance (e.g., bleaching, veneers).

**Crown:** A porcelain or gold cover for a decayed, damaged, or discolored tooth.

**Cross Bite:** Reverse biting relationship of upper and lower teeth, e.g., "under bite".

**Curettage:** Removal of diseased tissue from a periodontal pocket.

**Cuspid:** The large pointed teeth at the corners of the mouth, located between the incisors and bicuspids. Also known as canine or eyeteeth.

**Cusps:** The raised round parts on the chewing surface of the teeth.

**DDS:** Doctor of Dental Surgery

**DMD:** Doctor of Medical Dentistry

**Decay:** Destruction of tooth structure caused by toxins produced by bacteria.

**Deciduous Teeth:** Commonly called "baby teeth", the first set of (usually) twenty teeth.

**Dentin:** Inner layer of tooth structure, immediately under the surface enamel.

**Dental Floss:** A waxed or unwaxed piece of nylon string that is inserted between the teeth and moved in an up/down fashion for the removal of plaque or other food deposits.

**Dental Implant:** Usually a titanium cylinder surgically placed in the bone of the upper or lower jaw to provide support for a dental restoration or appliance.

**Dentition:** The arrangement of natural or artificial teeth in the mouth.

**Denture:** Removable (partial or complete) set of artificial teeth.

**Diastema:** Space between teeth.

**Enamel:** The hard tissue covering the portion of tooth above the gum line. This is the hardest substance in the body.

**Endodontics:** The branch of dentistry concerned with the treatment of the dental pulp or nerve of the tooth. The most common procedure is a root canal.

**Endodontist:** A specialist who treats injuries, diseases and infections of the tooth pulp.

**Extraction:** Removal of a tooth.

**Facing:** Tooth colored overlay on the visible portion of a crown.

**Filling:** Restoration of lost tooth structure with metal, porcelain or resin materials.

**Flap Surgery:** Lifting of gum tissue to expose and clean underlying tooth and bone structures.

**Fluoride:** A chemical that is used to strengthen the teeth.

**Frenectomy:** Removal or reshaping of thin muscle tissue that attaches the upper or lower lips to the gum, or the tongue to the floor of the mouth.

**General Anesthesia:** A "deep sleep" general anesthesia renders you unconscious.

**Gingivectomy:** Surgical removal of gum tissue.

**Gingivitis:** Inflammation of gum tissue, early stage of gum disease.

**Gum Recession:** Exposure of dental roots due to shrinkage of the gums as a result of abrasion, periodontal disease or surgery.

**Halimeter:** An instrument used in the diagnosis and treatment of chronic halitosis.

**Halitosis:** Bad breath.

**Heat Sterilization:** A procedure that involves a chamber into which instruments are placed and which raises the temperature for a period of time to kill all microorganisms.

**Hygienist:** A type of dental professional qualified to clean and scale teeth. They also educate patients on proper dental care.

**Imaging:** A photograph of teeth stored in a computer and then displayed on a television monitor. The dentist is able to show you an image of your smile with new, repaired or whitened teeth.

**Impacted Tooth:** A tooth that fails to erupt properly and remains fully or partially embedded and covered over by bone or gum tissue.

**Implant:** A fixed replacement for a missing tooth.

**Impression:** Mold made of the teeth and soft tissues.

**Incisors:** The four upper or lower single-cusped front teeth designed for incising or cutting food.

**Inlay:** A custom made cast-gold alloy that is cemented to a previously prepared cavity in the tooth.

**Interproximal:** Surfaces of adjoining teeth.

**Interocclusal:** Space between upper and lower teeth.

**Intraoral camera:** A small video camera used to view and magnify oral conditions; images may be viewed on a monitor or printed.

**IV Sedation:** Anesthesia used for people who want to be asleep during dental procedures. It is sometimes described as a "light" anesthesia. (See Anesthesia, Local Anesthesia).

**Jacket:** Crown for a front tooth, usually made of porcelain.

**Laminate:** Thin plastic or porcelain veneer produced in a dental laboratory and then bonded to a tooth.

**Lasers:** Dental lasers are a family of instruments, some used for surgery, some to cure (harden) restorative tooth materials and enhance tooth bleaching, and others to remove tooth structure to eliminate disease.

**Laughing Gas:** Nitrous oxide; odorless inhalation agent that produces relative sedation; reduces anxiety and creates a state of relaxation.

**Local Anesthesia:** Relieves the sensation of pain in a localized area. (See Anesthesia, IV Sedation).

**Malocclusion:** "Bad bite" or misalignment of the upper and lower teeth.

**Managed Care:** Program whereby patient-dentist agreement and dentist reimbursement is administered by a separate, external organization.

**Mandible:** The lower jaw.

**Margin:** Interface between a restoration and tooth structure.

**Maryland Bridge:** A bridge that is bonded to the back of the adjacent teeth; requires minimum tooth reduction.

**Maxilla:** The upper jaw.

**Medicated Filling:** A provisional or temporary filling which incorporates a palliative or soothing medication to calm an inflamed tooth nerve.

**Molars:** The back teeth that are designed for grinding food before swallowing.

**Mouth guard:** A removable appliance used to protect teeth from injury during athletic activities.

**Nerve (Root) Canal:** Dental pulp; the internal chamber of a tooth.

**Night Guard:** A removable acrylic appliance used to minimize the effects of grinding the teeth (bruxism) or joint problems (TMD), usually worn at night.

**Nitrous Oxide:** A gas used to reduce patient anxiety, also called "laughing gas".

**Occlusion:** Closure; relationship of the upper and lower teeth upon closure.

**Onlay:** A gold or porcelain inlay extended to cover the cusps for protection of the tooth.

**Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeon:** A specialist who deals with the diagnosis and surgical treatment of diseases, injuries, and deformities of the mouth and supporting structures.

**Oral Cavity:** The mouth.

**Oral Hygiene:** Process of maintaining cleanliness of the teeth and related structures.

**Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery:** Surgical procedures on the mouth including extractions, removal of cysts or tumors, and repair of fractured jaws.

**Oral Pathologist:** Dentist specializing in the study of oral diseases.

**Oral Sedation:** Any substance taken orally (i.e., a pill or liquid) to reduce anxiety and relax the patient.

**Oral Surgery:** Surgery of the mouth.

**Orthodontics:** Dental specialty that treats misalignment of teeth. Treatment usually consists of braces or a retainer.

**Overbite:** Vertical overlap of the front teeth.

**Over Denture:** Denture that fits over residual roots or dental implants.

**Palate:** The general term that refers to the roof of the mouth.

**Palliative Treatment:** Non-invasive relief of irritating conditions.

**Panorex:** A single full mouth x-ray.

**Partial Denture:** A removable appliance (prosthesis) that replaces some of the teeth in either the upper or lower jaw.

**Pathology:** Study of disease.

**Periapical (PA):** Region at the end of the roots of teeth.

**Pediatric Dentistry:** Dental specialty focusing on treatment of children's teeth.

**Periodontal Disease:** The general term for the inflammation or disease affecting the gums.

**Periodontal Surgery:** Recontouring or esthetic management of diseased gum and supporting tissue.

**Periodontics:** The treatment of diseases of the gum or bone (supporting structure).

**Periodontist:** A dentist who specializes in the treatment of gum disease.

**Periodontal Chart:** Record measuring the depth of gum pockets around the teeth.

**Permanent Teeth:** (Usually) thirty-two adult teeth in a complete dentition.

**Pit:** A small defect in the tooth enamel.

**Plaque:** A sticky substance that forms on the surface of the teeth and harbors bacteria growth and acid formation beneath its surface, causing tooth decay. Plaque buildup can irritate the gums and cause periodontal disease.

**Pontic:** Replacement tooth mounted on a fixed or removal appliance.

**Porcelain Crown:** All porcelain restoration covering the portion of tooth above the gum line.

**Porcelain Fused to Metal (PRM) Crown:** Restoration with metal coping (for strength) covered by porcelain (for appearance).

**Porcelain Inlay or Onlay:** Tooth-colored restoration made of porcelain, cemented or bonded in place.

**Porcelain Veneers:** A thin layer of porcelain bonded to a natural tooth to replace lost tooth structure, close spaces, straighten teeth or change color and/or shape.

**Post:** Thin metal rod inserted into the root of a tooth after root canal therapy; provided retention for a "coping" that replaces lost tooth structure and retains crown.

**PPO or PDO:** Preferred provider (dental) organization, which a health care (dental) provider may join, offering fee-for-service treatment at reduced fees.

**Preventive Services:** Dental procedures concerned with the prevention of dental diseases by protective and educational measures. May include exam, cleanings, x-rays and fluoride.

**Prophylaxis:** The professional cleaning and removal of plaque, stains, and calculus on the teeth.

**Prophy Jet:** Air polishing for stain removal.

**Prosthodontics:** The restoration of natural teeth and replacement of missing or lost teeth. Common procedures are crowns, bridges, dentures, and dental implants.

**Prosthodontist:** A dentist that specializes in the restoration of natural teeth and replacement of teeth. Expertise includes, but is not limited to: crowns, bridges, dentures, dental implants, TMD-jaw joint problems, and oral cancer reconstruction.

**Pulp:** The nerves, blood vessels and connective tissue inside a tooth.

**Pulp Chamber:** The opening in the center of the crown of a tooth, which contains the pulp (nerve tissue) and stretches to the tip of the root.

**Pulpectomy:** Complete removal of the pulp (commonly done in children's teeth).

**Quadrant:** One fourth of the mouth or half of the bottom or top section of the mouth.

**Reimplantation:** Insertion and temporary fixation of partially or completely dislodged tooth or teeth, resulting from traumatic injury.

**Reline:** Acrylic restoration of denture base.

**Restoration:** Replacement of portion of a damaged tooth.

**Retained Root:** Partial root structure remaining in jaw after extraction or fracture of a natural tooth.

**Retainer:** An appliance for maintaining the positions of the teeth and jaws immediately after the completion of orthodontic treatment.

**Root:** Tooth structure that connects the tooth to the jaw.

**Root Canal:** A procedure used to save an abscessed tooth in which the pulp chamber is cleaned out, disinfected, and filled with a permanent filling.

**Root Planning:** Deep cleaning of the teeth to remove hardened plaque below the gum line. This periodontal procedure is usually performed one quadrant at a time.

**Root Resection:** Removal of a portion of diseased root structure, retaining the remaining natural tooth.

**Saliva:** Clear lubricating fluid in the mouth.

**Saliva Ejector:** Suction tube placed in the mouth to remove saliva.

**Salivary Glands:** Located under tongue and in cheeks that produce saliva.

**Scaling:** A treatment for gum disease involving removal of hardened plaque (tartar or calculus) from teeth.

**Sealant:** Plastic coating applied to grooves of the teeth to prevent decay.

**Space Maintainer:** Dental device that holds the space lost through premature loss of baby teeth.

**Splint:** Connection of two or more teeth so they function as a stronger single structure.

**Supernumary Tooth:** Extra tooth.

**Tartar:** Calcified plaque that forms from mineral salts in the saliva and deposits on the teeth.

**TMD Temporomandibular Disorders:** Problems associated with the temporomandibular joint (TMJ), which connects the lower jaw with the skull. Typically associated with pops and pain in the joint.

**Third-Party Provider:** Insurance company that pays all or a part of the cost of dental treatment.

**Tooth Whitening:** A chemical or laser process to lighten the color of teeth.

**UCR:** Usual, customary and reasonable fees.

**Ultrasonic Cleaning:** Cleaning that uses high frequency sound waves to gently remove deposits, such as tartar and stain, from the teeth.

**Unerupted Tooth:** A tooth that has not pushed through the gum.

**Veneers:** Plastic or porcelain facing, which is bonded directly to a tooth to improve its appearance, producing a very natural appearance.

**Whitening:** A process, which lightens the color of teeth.

**Wisdom Teeth:** The third set of molars, the last teeth to come in, usually erupt at age 18-25.

**Zerostomia:** Dry mouth or decrease in the production of saliva.

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