

Dental Terminology

The field of dentistry utilizes extensive vocabulary unique to its profession. In this article we have decided to put together a short glossary of dental terminology which will most likely be encountered by you during your visit to the dentist.

Comprehensive Exam: This is the new patient exam and is designed to be comprehensive in scope. Your dentist will review your medical history and examine your teeth, check for gum disease and oral cancer. He will then provide a complete plan of all his findings and recommendations for all the conditions and teeth needing treatment.

Limited Exam: This is utilized when there is an emergency and a patient is complaining of pain or a specific problem. It is limited in scope to only the area in question. After the problem has been diagnosed and treated a comprehensive exam should be scheduled to insure that there are no other problems which should be fixed prior to it becoming another emergency.

Recall Exam: This is an exam performed every 6 months to insure that no new problems have manifested themselves since the last exam. It allows us to catch problems which may arise when they are small and more easily treated.

Panographic X-ray or Pano: This is an x-ray which captures the entire jaw. It allows us to track teeth development in young children and localize wisdom teeth as well as spot diseases of the jawbone.

Bitewings: These are smaller radiographs which let us see the teeth in detail and are used to diagnose caries.

PA's: These are smaller x-rays which are turned vertically and they allow us to see the root of the teeth in detail and are used to diagnose periodontal or gum disease and determine if infections of the root are present which may need root canal treatment.

Gingivitis: Gingivitis is a mild form of gum disease which the gums become red, swollen and bleed easily.

Periodontal Disease or periodontitis: In periodontitis, the gums pull away from the teeth and form "pockets" that are infected. Without treatment bone loss occurs which often leads to tooth loss.

Prophylaxis or Propy: This refers to a cleaning usually completed every 6 months which involves cleaning only healthy teeth and gums above the gum line.

Scaling and root planning: This treatment is utilized when periodontal or gum disease has been diagnosed and involves a deep cleaning under the gum tissue in diseased pockets.

Periodontal Maintenance: This is a follow up treatment to scaling and root planning performed every 3 months to keep pockets from becoming reinfected.

Composite Fillings: These are white fillings or bonding. They are used to restore cavities left by decay.

Amalgam Fillings: These are silver fillings. They are used to restore cavities left by decay.

Crown: A crown is like a cap and is used to restore teeth with large cavities or cracked or missing tooth structure. They are many different types of crowns: Gold, porcelain fused to metal and all ceramic.

Bridge: When a tooth is missing a bridge can be fabricated which is like three crowns. Two crowns on the natural teeth next to the space of the missing tooth and a crown to replace the missing tooth connected to the adjacent crowns.

Implants: A titanium screw which is placed in bone and integrates with the bone. It supports a crown and is the closest thing we have to replacing a lost tooth.

Partial dentures: Are replacement teeth for patients who have lost multiple teeth. There is a metal frame which holds the plastic teeth and clips onto the remaining teeth.

Dentures: Are replacement teeth for patients who have lost all their teeth.

If you encounter dental terminology which you do not understand always ask your dentist for an explanation to insure you understand your treatment options and needs.

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