

Dental Terms

Abscess - Acute or chronic, localized inflammation associated with tissue destruction.

Abutment - Tooth or root that retains or supports a bridge, fixed or removable denture.

Amalgam - A silver coloured alloy used in direct dental restorations.

Anesthesia - Drugs and procedures that relieve the sensation of pain. Various types include general anesthesia, IV sedation, and local anesthesia.

Attrition - The normal wearing down of the surface of a tooth from chewing.

Allograft - is a bone or tissue that is obtained from a person's body and transplanted into another person's body.

Autograft - is a bone or tissue that is taken from a part of a person's own body and transplanted into another.

Bite - The way the mouth closes, or the way in which the upper and lower teeth meet.

Bonding - A composite resin (white filling material) is applied to a tooth to change its shape and/or color. Bonding also refers to how a filling, orthodontic appliance or some crowns and bridges are attached to teeth.

Bone graft/augmentation - is a term that describes a variety of procedures used to replace or add bone to an area. These procedures typically involve grafting (adding) bone or bonelike materials to the jaw. The bone can be an autograft (from yourself), allograft (from another person) or xenograft (from a different species than the recipient).

Bridge - A bridge, also called a "fixed bridge" or a "fixed dental prosthesis," is a dental restoration that replaces one or more missing teeth. It extends across an area that has no teeth and is typically made up of an artificial tooth fused between 2 crowns. (A crown is a hollow, artificial tooth that fits over a natural tooth or a dental implant). The bridge is held firmly in place by your own teeth on each side of the missing one(s) or by dental implants. A bridge is permanent and cannot be removed.

Bruxism - Involuntary clenching or grinding of the teeth during the day or while asleep.

Calculus - Hard deposit of mineralized material, or calcified plaque, that adheres to teeth or crowns. (also known as tartar)

Caries - Also called a cavity is a decay lesion or a hole in the tooth caused by tooth decay.

Cap - A crown, also called a cap, is the covering of a tooth with metal, porcelain or porcelain fused to metal. It covers teeth that are weakened by decay or severely damaged or chipped. The crown restores the tooth and protects it from further damage. Crowns can also be used to cover a discoloured or misshapen teeth.

Cavity - Also called caries is a decay lesion or a hole in the tooth caused by tooth decay.

Cementum - A thin layer of hard connective tissue that covers the root of the tooth.

Complete denture - An artificial substitute for all of the natural teeth and adjacent tissues.

Composite Filling - A tooth-colored filling material (white filling) that looks like a natural tooth.

Crown - A crown, also called a cap, is the covering of a tooth with metal, porcelain or porcelain fused to metal. It covers teeth that are weakened by decay or severely damaged or chipped. The crown restores the tooth and protects it from further damage. Crowns can also be used to cover a discoloured or misshapen teeth.

Cuspids - The large (pointed) teeth at the corners of the mouth, located between the incisors and bicuspids. (Also known as canine teeth.)

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

Deciduous Teeth - Baby teeth or primary teeth include a set of twenty teeth that are usually replaced by permanent teeth.

Dental Public Health - Dental Public Health is that branch and specialty of dentistry concerned with the diagnosis, prevention and control of dental diseases and the promotion of oral health through organized community efforts. Dental Public Health serves the community through research, health promotion, education and group dental care programs. An Alberta public health dentist is a dentist who has successfully completed an accredited educational program in dental public health and currently holds such specialty designation from the Alberta Dental Association and College.

Denture: An artificial substitute for some or all of the natural teeth and adjacent tissues.

Diastema - The space between teeth, most often referring to the top two center teeth.

Digital Radiography - The use of computer imaging rather than traditional x-ray film to create and store images of teeth.

Dry socket – localized inflammation of the tooth socket following extraction due to infection or loss of blood clot; also known as alveolar osteitis. Generally causes moderate to severe pain.

Early Childhood Caries - The disease of early childhood caries (ECC) is the presence of 1 or more decayed (noncavitated or cavitated lesions), missing (due to caries), or filled tooth surfaces in any primary tooth in a child 71 months of age or younger.

Enamel - The hard calcified tissue covering over the outside of the tooth. It is the hardest substance in the body.

Endodontics - Endodontics is that branch and specialty of dentistry concerned with the morphology, physiology and pathology of the dental pulp and periradicular tissues. Its study and practice encompass the basic clinical sciences, including biology of the normal pulp, and etiology, diagnosis prevention, and treatment of diseases and injuries of the pulp and associated periradicular tissues.

Endodontist - An Alberta dentist who has successfully completed an accredited education program in endodontics and currently holds such specialty designation from the Alberta Dental Association and College.

Extraction - The removal (pulling) of a tooth

Filling - Restoring lost tooth structure with amalgam, metal, porcelain, or composite resin. Used as part of the treatment of cavities.

Flipper denture - is a type of temporary denture that usually replaces one or just a few teeth.

Fluoride - A chemical compound that prevents cavities and makes the tooth surface stronger so that teeth are able to resist decay.

General Anesthesia - A controlled state of unconsciousness or deep sleep, accompanied by a partial or complete loss of pain sensation, as well as protective reflexes, and including a loss of the ability to independently maintain a breathing airway and respond purposefully to verbal or physical stimulation. Must be administered by a licensed anesthesiologist.

Gingivitis - inflammation of the gums surrounding the teeth caused by a buildup of plaque or food particles.

Halitosis - A term for bad breath.

Impacted Tooth - A tooth that fails to erupt properly and remains fully or partially embedded and covered over by bone or gum tissue. This most often occurs with wisdom teeth. If it's not removed, impacted teeth can cause pain, headaches, infection and malocclusion.

Implant - A fixed replacement for a missing tooth. The procedure involves the implanting of a metal shaft, usually titanium, in the jawbone. A prosthetic (artificial) tooth is then affixed to this shaft, providing a replacement for a lost tooth.

Impressions - An imprint of teeth and/or soft tissues used to create a cast or model.

Incisors - The four upper or lower front teeth designed for incising (cutting) food.

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

Local Anesthesia - Relieves the sensation of pain in a localized area. Done topically or by injection.

Malocclusion - The improper alignment of biting or chewing surfaces of the upper and lower teeth.

Mandible - the lower jaw

Maxilla - the upper jaw

Molars - The back teeth that used for grinding food before swallowing.

Mouthguard - A removable appliance used to protect teeth from injury during athletic activities.

Nightguard - A removable acrylic appliance used to minimize the effects of grinding the teeth (bruxism) or joint problems (TMD), usually worn at night. The appliance is created using exact impressions of the patient's teeth taken by a dentist.

Nitrous Oxide - Colorless, sweet-tasting gas with a pleasing smell when inhaled (also called laughing gas), used to help patients relax during treatment. While not technically a form of anesthesia, the distraction and relaxation of the patient usually helps to reduce the discomfort of the procedure.

Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery - Oral and maxillofacial surgery is that branch and specialty of dentistry which is concerned with and includes the diagnosis, surgical and adjunctive treatment of disorders, diseases, injuries and defects, involving the functional and esthetic aspects of the hard and soft tissues of the oral and maxillofacial regions and related structures.

Oral and maxillofacial surgeon - An Alberta dentist who has successfully completed an accredited education program in oral and maxillofacial surgery and currently holds such specialty designation from the Alberta Dental Association and College.

Oral Medicine and Pathology - Oral Medicine and Pathology is the branch and specialty of dentistry concerned with the diagnosis, nature and primarily non-surgical management of oral, maxillofacial and temporomandibular diseases and disorders, including dental management of patients with medical complications. Oral medicine and oral pathology are two applied components of this specialty. An Alberta dentist of oral medicine and pathology is a dentist who has successfully completed an accredited education program in oral medicine and oral pathology and currently holds such specialty designation from the Alberta Dental Association and College.

Oral and Maxillofacial Radiology - Oral and Maxillofacial Radiology is that branch and specialty of dentistry concerned with the prescription, production and interpretation of diagnostic images for the diagnosis and management of diseases and disorders of the craniofacial complex. An Alberta oral and maxillofacial radiologist is a dentist who has successfully completed an accredited education program in oral and maxillofacial radiology and currently holds such specialty designation from the Alberta Dental Association and College.

Oral Sedation - Any substance taken orally to reduce anxiety and relax the patient.

Oral Surgery - The surgery of the mouth including removal of teeth.

Orthodontics and Dentofacial Orthopedics - Orthodontics and Dentofacial Orthopedics is that branch and specialty of dentistry concerned with the supervision, guidance and correction of the growing or mature dentofacial structures and the diagnosis, prevention and treatment of any abnormalities associated with these structures.

Orthodontist - An Alberta dentist who has successfully completed an accredited education program in orthodontics and dentofacial orthopedics and currently holds such specialty designation from the Alberta Dental Association and College.

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

Panoramic Radiograph - A single large x-ray of the jaws taken by a machine that rotates around the head.

Partial Denture - A removable denture that replaces some of the teeth in either the upper or lower jaw, as opposed to a full denture, which replaces all the upper or lower teeth.

Pediatric Dentistry - Pediatric Dentistry is that branch and specialty of dentistry concerned with providing primary and comprehensive preventive and therapeutic oral health diagnosis, care and consultative expertise for infants and children through adolescence, including those of all ages with special care needs.

Pediatric dentist - An Alberta dentist who has successfully completed an accredited education program in pediatric dentistry and currently holds such specialty designation from the Alberta Dental Association and College.

Periodontics - Periodontics is that branch and specialty of dentistry concerned with the diagnosis, prevention, and treatment of diseases and conditions of the supporting and surrounding tissues of the teeth or their substitutes and the maintenance of the health, function and aesthetics of these structures and tissues.

Periodontist - An Alberta periodontist a dentist who has successfully completed an accredited education program in periodontics and currently holds such specialty designation from the Alberta Dental Association and College.

Plaque - A bacteria-containing substance that collects on the surface of teeth. Plaque can cause decay and gum irritation when it is not removed by daily brushing and flossing.

Pontic - the term used for an artificial tooth on a bridge (fixed partial denture).

Prophylaxis - A professional cleaning to remove plaque, calculus (mineralized plaque) and stains to help prevent dental disease (Also known as a prophylaxis).

Prosthodontics - Prosthodontics is that branch and specialty of dentistry concerned with the diagnosis, restoration and maintenance of oral function, comfort, appearance and health of the patient by the restoration of the natural teeth and/or the replacement of missing teeth and contiguous oral and maxillofacial tissues with artificial substitutes.

Prosthodontist - An Alberta dentist who has successfully completed an accredited education program in prosthodontics and currently holds such specialty designation from the Alberta Dental Association and College.

Pulp Chamber - The opening in the center of the crown of a tooth that contains the pulp (nerve tissue) and stretches to the tip of the root.

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

Radiograph - Often referred to as an "x-ray" is used for diagnostic purposes. Types of radiographs taken include bitewing, periapical and panoramic radiographs.

Rampant caries - Rapidly progressive caries in many teeth simultaneously. Rampant caries in a child 71 months of age or younger is referred to as severe early childhood caries.

Restoration - A broad term applied to any filling, inlay, crown, bridge, partial denture, or complete denture that restores or replaces loss of tooth structure, teeth or oral tissue. This term applies to the end result of repairing, restoring or reforming the shape, form and function of part or all of a tooth or teeth.

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

Root Canal Therapy - (endodontic therapy) the treatment of a tooth having a damaged pulp. Root Canal Therapy usually includes completely removing the pulp, sterilizing the pulp chamber and root canals, and filling these spaces with sealing material.

Root Planning - The deep cleaning of the teeth to remove hardened plaque below the gum line.

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

Sealant - A thin plastic film painted on the chewing surfaces of teeth to prevent cavities.

Sedative filling - A temporary restoration (filling) intended to relieve pain.

Temporary crown (provisional crown, interim crown) – is a temporary (short-term) crown used in dentistry. Like other interim restorations, it serves until a final (definitive) restoration can be inserted.

TMD (Temporomandibular Disorders) - Problems associated with the temporomandibular joint (TMJ) which connects the lower jaw with the skull.

Ultrasonic Cleaning - Tooth cleaning (prophylaxis) that uses high frequency sound waves to gently remove deposits such as tartar and stains from the teeth.

Veneers - Plastic or porcelain which is bonded directly to a tooth to improve its appearance, giving it a very natural appearance.

White filling - A tooth-colored composite filling material that looks like a natural tooth.

Whitening - A process of teeth whitening that uses special compounds usually containing hydrogen peroxide. Sometimes lasers are used in conjunction with these compounds. Over-the-counter whitening products are not the prescription strength that dentists use and are therefore less effective.

Wisdom Teeth - The third set of molars that are the last teeth to come in. For many people, wisdom teeth become impacted and must be removed.

Xenograft - A tissue graft or organ transplant from a donor of a different species from the recipient.

X-ray - Radiation used for diagnostic purposes to radiograph the bone tissue of the tooth above and below the gum line. Types of radiographs taken include bitewing, periapical and panoramic radiographs.