

Preventive dental care includes actions taken by a patient to protect against oral diseases and maintain a healthy smile for a lifetime. These actions include daily brushing with a fluoride-containing toothpaste, flossing, and maintaining a healthy diet—along with scheduling regular oral exams and professional cleanings.

Dental insurance plans tend to prioritize preventive dental care because of the important role it plays in overall oral health. Therefore, preventive dental services are often covered at 100 percent with minimal or no deductibles or co-pays (in other words, minimal out-of-pocket costs). In addition, with some plans, preventive services are not counted against your annual maximum.



Which services or procedures are considered preventive dentistry?

Preventive dentistry includes services provided by your dentist to reduce the likelihood of contracting oral health conditions that can be more expensive to treat and uncomfortable to experience. The following dental services typically fall under the preventive dentistry umbrella:

- Diagnostic services utilized to catch signs of oral problems early including:
 - Oral evaluations (check-ups)
 - X-rays
- Professional cleanings
- Fluoride treatments, especially for children
- Sealants, which are coverings that are applied to the top surfaces of permanent molars to prevent decay inside the grooves that naturally occur in these teeth
- Educational instruction provided by your dentist or dental hygienist, including:
 - Techniques for proper brushing, flossing, and use of other oral hygiene aids
 - Nutritional and/or tobacco cessation counseling
- Space maintainers for children
- In special circumstances, preventive resin restorations or decay-arresting medication applied to teeth, typically given to children at high risk for developing decay

Preventive dentistry services are labeled as such because they allow your dentist to monitor your oral health, promote healthy habits, prevent new disease through a variety of treatment services, and catch signs of oral health problems early. This gives you and your dentist sufficient time to identify, treat and reverse the issue.

Services such as fillings, root canal therapy, periodontal treatments, orthodontics, or tooth extractions are not considered preventive dentistry—they are instead geared towards remedying an existing problem and typically fall under the “umbrella” of basic or major procedures.

During a regular dental checkup, your dentist will perform an oral exam to check for signs of decay or gum disease, abnormal tooth wear, problems with alignment or mechanics, soft tissue diseases (such as oral cancers), and more. This exam is usually followed by a professional cleaning, along with sealant and fluoride application when appropriate, to ensure a clean, healthy, and protected mouth.

Preventive dentistry services should not be ignored. Seeing your dentist regularly and preventing oral health problems can help you maintain your overall health and wellness as you age, and save you time, money, and potential discomfort by avoiding serious dental disease.

Make sure to keep up with oral exams and cleanings at regular intervals as determined by your dentist.

How can I improve my oral health via at-home preventive dental care?

It's important to maintain good oral hygiene habits at home in order to keep your teeth and gums healthy in between dentist appointments. The ADA recommends brushing twice per day for at least two minutes each time using a fluoride-containing toothpaste.¹ In addition, you should floss at least once per day.

Use a mouthguard when participating in sports or recreational activities that potentially may result in mouth injuries, and ask your dentist about wearing a bite/night guard if you clench or grind your teeth. Avoid smoking or chewing tobacco—and ask your dentist if you need help quitting. Tobacco use is associated with higher rates of periodontal disease, oral cancer, and other adverse health effects.²

Lastly, eat a balanced diet: Avoid sugary foods, soft drinks, and starchy, high-carbohydrate snacks, drink plenty of water throughout the day, and consume a varied array of fruits and vegetables to ensure you're getting enough vitamins and minerals to support long-term oral health.

What are the benefits of preventive dentistry?

Preventive dentistry reduces your risks for the following conditions:

- Tooth decay (cavities)
- Gum disease (periodontal disease)
- Receding gums
- Tooth sensitivity
- Losing teeth
- Abnormal tooth wear
- Other oral health conditions
- Having poor oral health may contribute towards other serious health issues, like diabetes and heart disease

Children should be taught good oral health habits from a young age and encouraged to brush and floss after meals or at least twice per day. For the best chance at a lifetime of excellent oral health, teach children how to avoid tooth decay and gum problems right from the start, when they get their first teeth. The healthiest tooth is the one that never needs repair.

Does my dental plan cover preventive dental care?

Preventive dental care is covered to varying degrees by most dental insurance plans. However, it is important that you check with your dental insurer to understand what services are covered under your plan. The following preventive services are typically covered:

- Oral evaluations (check-ups) and teeth cleanings: Generally, two per year. Talk to your dentist about the right frequency for your oral health needs.
- Fluoride treatments: These are typically plan-dependent, so check what services are covered under your plan. Some plans include this service as preventive to children only.
- Dental sealants: These are typically plan-dependent, so check what services are covered under your plan.
- Annual x-rays: Depending on your plan, these may also be included under diagnostic services.

Improve your oral health with Delta Dental! Find a dentist.

Sources:

¹ Brushing Your Teeth. (n.d.). American Dental Association. Retrieved from mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/b/brushing-your-teeth

² Tobacco Use and Cessation. (n.d.). American Dental Association. Retrieved from ada.org/resources/research/science-and-research-institute/oral-health-topics/tobacco-use-and-cessation