

# It's not just a **CLEANING!**

## The Role of Your Dental Hygienist

While brushing and flossing daily help to remove a great deal of plaque, it is nearly impossible to eliminate all of it. Once plaque hardens into tartar (calculus), the only way it can be removed is by a professional cleaning by your dental hygienist. We say that we are going to have our teeth cleaned – but a lot more than simple cleaning takes place during this visit!

### What will be addressed during your visit and why is it important?

- **Health History** - Your hygienist will ask you about your general health and your dental health and any recent changes in either. By doing so she will pinpoint any issues that require special precautions during your cleaning.
- **Cancer Screening** - Next, the hygienist carefully examines the skin in and around your mouth looking for lumps, bumps, sores, tenderness or swellings and refers areas of concern to the dentist for further evaluation.
- **Evaluating Your Periodontal Health** - Your hygienist will look closely at the state of your periodontal health. This includes checking your gums and the other tissues surrounding your teeth for inflammation (gingivitis) or bleeding.
- **Checking for Decay** - The hygienist will examine your teeth for decay.
- **Scaling** - The hygienist will note the location and condition of stains or hard mineral deposits (calculus or tartar), then uses specialized tools to remove the deposits from your teeth.
- **Polishing** - A mechanical polisher and polishing compound are used to polish the surface of your teeth so that they are smooth, making them more resistant to plaque, removing stains and leaving your teeth feeling squeaky clean.
- **Measuring** - The hygienist uses a tiny probe to measure the space between your teeth and gums. Periodontal disease begins by forming pockets between the teeth and gums, so this measuring is key to your periodontal health. Generally, a space of 3mm or less indicates healthy gums, pockets of 4 to 5mm indicate periodontal disease that may be reversed with good oral care at home, and pockets that are 6mm deep or more require specialized treatment by your dentist or periodontist.
- **Education** - Based on the observed conditions of your gums and teeth, the hygienist will provide information aimed at improving your home oral cleansing routines and about your risk for tooth decay and gum disease.



*The information provided is not intended as medical or dental advice and should not be interpreted as such. The intent is to provide as much scientific information as possible on different dental materials and aspects of dentistry where controversy exists and scientific clarification would be of benefit to patients, staff, dentists, physicians and scientists in making informed judgements. If you seek medical or dental advice, please consult with a health care professional. You must always exercise your own best judgement when using the services of any health care practitioner.*