

# Dreaming of a Dental Career?



Have you ever wondered what it would be like to work in the dental profession? Each dental team member has a unique job that requires a specific skill set, and each member is crucial to a successful practice and high-quality patient care. If you've ever thought about a career in dentistry, read on!

## What is a general dentist?

General dentists make up the majority of the more than 150,000 dentists practicing in the United States and Canada. General dentists, the primary dental care providers for all patients, are responsible for diagnosing and treating patients. General dentists care for their patients' oral health, which plays an important role in a person's overall health. General dentists also coordinate care with dentists in other specialties when a patient requires a specialized procedure.

## What are the dental specialties?

In addition to general dentistry, there are recognized dental specialties. These dental specialists include the following:

- **Pediatric dentists** treat the overall oral health needs of children.
- **Orthodontists** improve patients' smiles by straightening crooked teeth and misaligned jaws with braces and other appliances.
- **Prosthodontists** specialize in the restoration (fixing) and replacement of teeth. This may include reconstruction of the oral cavity with full mouth rehabilitation and restoration of function following trauma or oral cancer.
- **Periodontists** care for patients' gums and other tissues that support the teeth. They also treat patients with severe bone loss.
- **Endodontists** perform root canal therapy and may surgically treat the roots of teeth.

- **Oral pathologists** examine and diagnose tumors and lesions of the mouth.
- **Oral and maxillofacial surgeons** care for patients who experience problems with the jaws and facial structures. This includes the extraction of teeth, removing tumors and cysts, treating facial injuries and trauma, correcting improper jaw alignment, and reconstructive treatment.

## How does someone become a dentist?

To become a general dentist, you must earn a bachelor's degree with a strong science foundation: Biology, chemistry, physics, and mathematics are crucial. Admission to dental school, which lasts four years, requires high grades in undergraduate study and a competitive score on the Dental Admission Test. After graduating from dental school, you'll have to take licensure examinations required by the state in which you wish to practice. Some states require a residency following dental school. Specialization requires another two to six years of school and/or a specialty residency program.

## How can I learn more?

If you've thought about a career in dentistry and you're in school, talk with your counselor or teacher about the day-to-day responsibilities of a dental professional and the requirements to become one. Also, talk to your dentist. He or she may let you "shadow" him or her for a few days to learn about what happens in a dental practice. For more information about dental careers, read the U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Outlook Handbook online at <http://stats.bls.gov/oco>.

## Resources

[www.agd.org](http://www.agd.org)

At the AGD's Web site, you can search more than 300 oral health topics, post a dental question, sign up for e-newsletters, find an AGD dentist, and more.

## 877.2X.A.YEAR

AGD's toll-free referral number. Call to locate an AGD member dentist in your area.