



## Introduction

As an Expat, choosing health care providers can be a daunting activity and one that can have a big impact on the entire family. Many people have anxiety and fears related to visiting doctors and dentists and this becomes compounded when in a new country where everything seems so strange. Luckily, Singapore has a very high standard of health care.

It can be just as important to have regular check-ups with a dentist as it is with a doctor; however, globally we are finding that adults are neglecting to visit the dentist. A United Kingdom survey by the insurer Bupa Dental Care revealed that more than 2 million UK adults have confessed to not visiting a dentist in over 10 years, with more than a third admitting that they ignore any dental pain or mask it with pain killers.

The survey also revealed that a quarter of Brits will skip brushing their teeth if they are in a hurry and a third stated they have never flossed or visited the hygienist. Many people wait until something goes wrong and they are in pain before researching and contacting a dentist. In addition, more than half of American adults (57%) have made an unplanned visit to the dentist, according to a recent national survey.



According to a recent American survey, 33% of unplanned dental visits are due to pain in the mouth. Many of these unplanned visits might be avoided with a regular dental check-up routine and a few simple changes to your daily oral hygiene. Of course, any complete visit to the dentist should include seeing a dental hygienist or oral health therapist.

## Dental Hygienists

In the United States, Australia and many other western countries a dental hygienist is a well-known and established profession.

In other parts of the world however, hygienists are relatively rare and regarded as 'optional extra' dental care providers. All dental hygienists (also known as oral health therapists) in Singapore must undergo training for up to three years with an accredited educational institution in order to receive their certification.

The dental hygienist or oral health therapist is a vital resource for both patients and dental surgeons. Dental hygienists focus on preventative oral care which allows dental surgeons to concentrate on restorative and surgical treatment. Hygienists ensure patients keep their mouths healthy and clean to minimize the risk of expensive dental treatment resulting from gum disease and tooth decay.

Gum disease has been linked to heart disease and diabetes and is now viewed as vital to holistic medical care. In addition, dental hygienists will often spend time assessing a patient's oral care routine and ask questions about brushing and flossing, general health and nutrition.

By checking historical dental records and through oral examination, hygienists will highlight areas of concern in the patient's mouth. Another important part of the hygienist's role is educating patients.

Since hygienists are often the practitioners patients visit most, they are a great source of information about oral hygiene as well as new products, procedures and treatments. For patients with healthy teeth and gums,

regular six-month checkup and cleaning appointments with the hygienist are recommended to ensure proper oral health.

A hygienist's job is to ensure that patients maintain a healthy mouth, so when it comes to emergency or restorative dental procedures, the dentist's job is made easier.

## What sort of dentist do I need?

There are a number of emerging fields in dentistry and it is often best to find a practice that has a number of dental surgeons who are very experienced or specialise in a certain field.

## General Dentistry

This type of dentistry encompasses simple, restorative procedures such as fillings and crowns, to the most complex full mouth rehabilitations. There is much innovation happening in restorative technology and your dental practice can educate and guide you on what is appropriate for your situation. Thanks to technological advances in bio materials, dental fillings can now be done very conservatively, maintaining as much healthy tooth structure as possible. With the use of metal free, tooth colored filling materials, it is possible to restore damaged tooth structure seamlessly to its former glory.

Occasionally, loss of significant tooth structure necessitates the use of a more extensive restorative option. In these cases, dentists are able to repair and rebuild your tooth using aesthetic, high strength materials such as porcelain and zirconia.

These materials can be matched to your tooth color to fit seamlessly as part of your beautiful smile. A crown, commonly known as a "cap", is a cover for the tooth, which can be used to protect, strengthen and often improve the aesthetic appearance of a damaged or unsightly tooth.

It can be used beneficially in a variety of scenarios including where there has been damage to a tooth by decay, fracture or trauma, where a tooth was poorly formed during development or, where one or more teeth are simply poorly shaped or positioned and orthodontic treatment is not indicated. Full Mouth Rehabilitation is the repair or reconstruction of most or all teeth along with the replacement of missing teeth. This procedure is necessary when teeth are damaged due to decay, trauma, or excessive wear.

Missing, damaged, and unevenly worn teeth can cause problems with function and occlusion, not only affecting speech and chewing, but also leading to damage and pain in the jaw joints and musculature of the head, neck and back.

Though the procedure can be complex, your dentist will be able to provide you with all the details required and find an individual solution that provides the best results for you. Treatment may include a combination of fillings, crowns, veneers, implants, and whitening – all specifically designed to restore a functional, healthy and beautiful smile.

## Pediatric Dentistry

When to first take a child to the dentist is a very common question amongst parents. It might seem like a very young age but certainly by two years of age all children should have been to the dentist at least once. Ideally the first visit does not reveal any concerns, though it is not uncommon, but is aimed at introducing each toddler to the dental environment with a fun and pleasant experience.

As a parent this is also a great opportunity to clarify any unanswered questions you may have about looking after your child's teeth. Six monthly visits should continue after the first visit while introducing something new at every visit until your toddler is completely comfortable getting a comprehensive exam and a cleaning done while your dentist can detect any concerns early.

At six years of age changes start to occur which your dentist will monitor closely. The first wiggly tooth often distracts from the first adult molar coming into place. A panoramic X-ray will be taken at this stage to confirm that dental development is progressing normally. Early orthodontic indicators can often be identified between six and nine years of age.

## Orthodontics

Orthodontics is an area of dental care that is experiencing rapid change due to technology. It is easy to be confused about the myriad of choices and products on the market.

Patients, however, should be careful of 'quick fixes' or 'do it yourself' orthodontic products.

Only experienced orthodontic dentists can ascertain what is best for your mouth when it comes to achieving straight teeth. And this is especially important for children. An orthodontist can begin to detect problems such as crowding, or bite issues that can interfere with the child's growth and development, sleep and learning.

Teenage and adult patients may be prescribed traditional metal braces and wires, as well as more aesthetic options such as clear braces and white wires. At your consult, the doctor will usually go over orthodontic issues, whether they be cosmetic or functional. A treatment plan and estimated time will be assessed, and then discuss options for treatment.

**Metal braces** – These are the most commonly used type of brackets for treatment. Find out if the products are made from the highest quality stainless steel brackets from the United States, and from well known and reputable companies. Should you need to transfer during your treatment, your new doctor should recognize and be familiar with the braces.

**Clear braces** – Clear braces are very similar in size and shape to metal brackets, the only difference is that they are made from ceramic porcelain. They are a good option if patients are more concerned about visibility of

the brackets during treatment.

Invisalign® – Invisalign® is a form of orthodontic treatment that uses a series of clear plastic trays to move your teeth. If the doctor decides at your consult that your case is suitable for Invisalign®, a digital scan of your teeth will be taken and sent to the manufacturer. The doctor will then work with the technicians on your treatment prescription.

Each tray is planned for a specific movement, and your teeth will move gradually overtime as the trays are replaced.

## Cosmetic Dentistry

This is another area where advances in computer technology have given birth to many practices in the quest for achieving that dream smile.

Again, caution is recommended and patients are urged to do their research before embarking on a course of treatment that could major health problems later.

Veneers are thin porcelain shells that are custom fitted to improve the color, position, and shape of your teeth. This minimally invasive procedure can truly alter the look of your smile, giving you straighter, whiter teeth while conserving tooth structure, requiring little or no drilling.

The first step is a consultation with your dentist to determine the look and feel you wish to achieve. Impressions and photos are taken and an aesthetic mockup of the final product is created on models to ensure you get exactly the result you want. Upon your approval of the design, the teeth are prepared for the final restorations.

Composite bonding is a minimally invasive procedure in which composite resin is used to improve the shape and appearance of teeth. Whether you wish to close a gap in your teeth, straight uneven teeth, or change the entire appearance of your smile, bonding provides amazing results in a pain-free procedure that won't damage your teeth.

Using high-resolution dental photography, our dentists are able to thoroughly and effectively plan procedures and treatments to give you the results you desire. Intra-oral and facial photographs help us communicate with labs to ensure highly aesthetic restorations, and allow us to identify every detail of your teeth and smile to visualize the final result before we ever begin treatment.

Whether eliminating wrinkles, designing a full set of veneers, or making a few minor improvements to your smile, cutting-edge photography equipment and techniques ensure that you get the outcome you desire.

## What about Whitening?

### ZOOM! In-office Whitening

Zoom In-office Whitening is ideal for anyone wanting immediate results and white teeth. In this process, a protective barrier is applied to your gums to protect the soft tissue. A special light-activated gel is then applied to your teeth and a special light is used to enhance the action of the agent, making your teeth whiter and brighter.

As a final step, dentists take impressions of your teeth to create custom trays for at-home touch-ups, and give you instructions for keeping your smile bright.

## Did you say Botox?

Aesthetic Dentistry is a term that commonly refers to procedures that can help enhance the appearance of your teeth and smile; however aesthetic dentistry is more than just braces for teenagers and Invisalign. Did you know that dentists are trained on the anatomy of the head and neck and how the facial muscles work? That is why some will perform cosmetic treatments as well as traditional dentistry. Some clinics provide treatments that aim to enhance your total look.

Treating with products like muscle relaxants and dermal fillers with an aim toward projecting health, vitality and confidence, as well as a beautiful set of teeth. It is well known that muscle relaxants, like Botox®, are used to reduce the appearance of crow's feet and frown lines on the forehead, as well as deep lines around your mouth, but it can also be used to give definition to your jaw-line and help shape your face to achieve the slimmer V-shape.

Many use Botox® in an effort to reduce high smile lines and relax the larger jaw muscles. Clenching these muscles often results in headaches and grinding teeth, Botox® can reduce the associated ill-effects on your teeth and on your daily well being.

Dermal fillers are used to smooth the appearance of lines and provide volume and structure to the face. As we age, collagen is often lost and this can produce a sagging and sunken look in some facial areas. Using fillers around the mouth, in cheeks, jawlines, lips and eyes, can help to boost lost volume and possibly reduce lines and sagging. Careful use of these fillers can rejuvenate your facial appearance with surprising results.

Living in Singapore provides us with wonderful opportunities for travel, leisure and outdoor family fun, but the tropical, sunny climates can often take its toll on your skin's health. Look for a dentist who takes a conservative holistic approach to skin health and your overall look and well being.

## Emerging Treatments

Dental Bruxism is the medical term used to describe habitual clenching or grinding of the teeth and jaw. Stiff or fatigued jaw muscles when you wake in the morning, headaches, neck aches, sensitive teeth, jaw pain, noises when opening or closing your mouth; all of these can be signs of dental bruxism and TMJ disorder.

There has been much research coming out over the last few years concerning this issue. Previously dentists were trained to think that grinding issues were just stress related and the ultimate fix was to wear a night-guard for the rest of your life. The research has been clear that lack of sleep can cause a variety of problems. In adults some of these issues include hypertension, heart disease, fatigue, anxiety, stress, and lack of mental clarity.

In children, attention deficit disorder, hyperactivity, bed wetting, allergies, and stunted growth and development have been associated with a lack of sleep and disordered breathing. And these problems may go on to affect school performance.

By retraining habits like tongue position, breathing techniques, and swallowing techniques, we can stop grinding and help patients sleep better. Depending on the individual circumstances, oral appliances, medication or surgery maybe required.

## Oral Appliance Therapy

Can be used to treat both snoring and obstructive sleep apnea in adults. An oral appliance is a device similar to orthodontic retainers joined by a flexible connector and worn while asleep. The device allows your airway to remain open by supporting the lower jaw in a slightly forward position and providing forced air through flexible tubes.

These devices are best designed and fitted by experienced dentist strained in sleep disorder therapy. In some severe cases, surgery may be an option for treatment.

When treating children, if caught early enough, providers may be able to prevent the need for braces and allow them to live a healthier life without a grinding habit and a sleep disorder in adulthood. If you feel you or someone in your family may have sleep disordered breathing, the

sooner you can fix the problem the sooner you will be on the path to a much fuller life, free of the health issues that come with poor sleep.

The health care system in Singapore is world-class with many well trained practitioners and the latest technology to draw on. And it is often expensive. So when it comes to a dental care provider for expats look for a practice that gives you a style of care that you are comfortable with. Local dentists' styles of communication, informing patients about procedures as well as attitudes to pain management might be different to what you are expecting.

The best way to end up with the kind of dental care that you would receive back at home is to do your research and ask your community groups and contacts for recommendations.

That way you will find a partner in your family's oral health whom you can stick with while you enjoy Singapore for however long you stay.

## AT A GLANCE

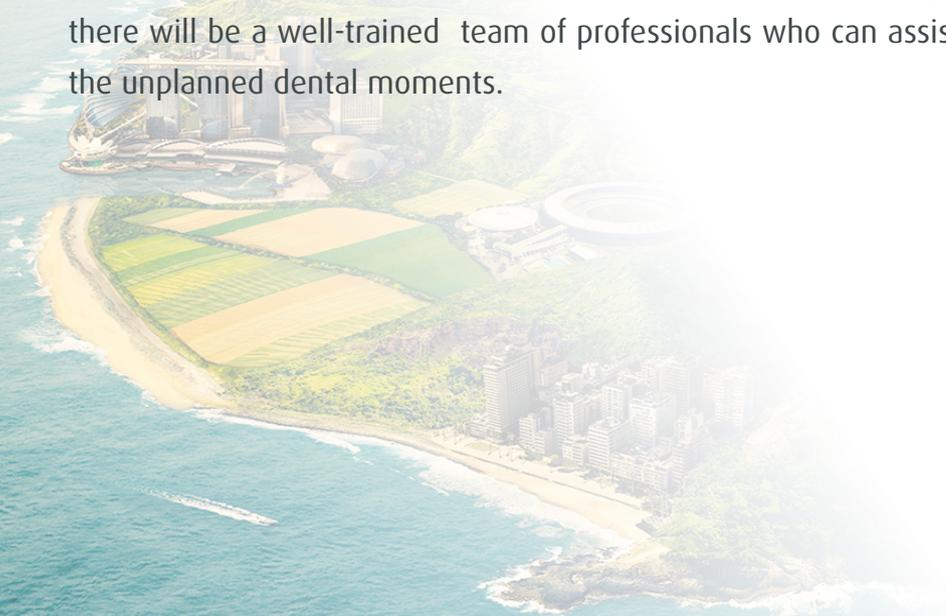
It's important to choose a great dentist before you're in pain. It seems obvious that it is important to have a dental practice you can trust to care for you and your family.

Many people however, wait until they have pain before investigating a dentist. Don't wait.

Here are some tips to help you find the right dentist for you and your family.

- Your dentist should take a holistic approach to your oral health and have a long-term view on the care that they provide. You should be able to receive oral cancer screening and information on prevention of problems before they occur. Dental hygienists can also help educate family members about maintenance of a healthy mouth and provide tips and hygiene strategies.
- Your dentist and hygienist should be able to tell you about new developments and emerging research in dental care technology and how they relate to your overall health and well being. They should care for the total person, not just your mouth. It is comforting to know that staff are undertaking ongoing training and learning in their field.
- Your dental care practice should remind you when you need to come in for a check-up or clean. Regular check-ups can help reduce anxiety about small problems when they do crop up. When it comes to children knowing how your baby or child's teeth are erupting means that you can plan for restorative or corrective treatments in the future.

- It is ideal if your dental practice has dental surgeons who specialise or are experienced with your particular problem. Dental surgeons with experience in pediatric dentistry or orthodontics, sleep problems or implantology for example are invaluable to the patients to ensure they have a specialised personal care plan.
- Your dental practice should present you with a clear and specific plan when restorative treatment is required. They should be able to help you with the payment and insurance process.
- Lastly and perhaps most importantly you should be able to know who to call when you have an emergency. A dentist who knows you and your family will be able to check x-rays and treat your emergency problems more quickly. This will reduce anxiety and the length of time you are waiting or in pain. It is about peace of mind knowing that there will be a well-trained team of professionals who can assist for the unplanned dental moments.



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