



Glossary of Commonly Used Dental Terms

A

- **Abutment:** A tooth or implant used to support a prosthesis. A crown unit used as part of a fixed bridge.
- **Abscess:** A localized inflammation due to a collection of pus in the bone or soft tissue, usually caused by an infection.
- **Amalgam:** A dental filling material, composed of mercury and other minerals, used to fill decayed teeth.
- **Alveoplasty:** A surgical procedure used to recontour the supporting bone structures in preparation of a complete or partial denture.
- **Anesthetic:** A class of drugs that eliminated or reduces pain. See local anesthetic.
- **Anterior:** Refers to the teeth and tissues located towards the front of the mouth (upper or lower incisors and canines).
- **Apex:** The tip end of a root.
- **Apexification:** A method of inducing apical closure, or the continual apical development of the root of an incompletely formed tooth, in which the pulp is no longer vital.

B

- **Bicuspid:** A two-cuspid tooth found between the molar and the cuspid also known as an eye tooth or canine tooth.
- **Biopsy:** A process of removing tissue to determine the existence of pathology.
- **Bitewing x-ray:** X-rays taken of the crowns of teeth to check for decay.
- **Bleaching:** The technique of applying a chemical agent, usually hydrogen peroxide, to the teeth to whiten them.
- **Bondin:** A process to chemically etch the tooth's enamel to better attach (bond) composite filling material, veneers, or plastic/acrylic.
- **Bone loss:** The breakdown and loss of the bone that supports the teeth, usually caused by infection or long-term occlusal (chewing areas of the teeth) stress.
- **Bridge:** A fixed prosthetic replacement of one or more missing teeth cemented or attached to the abutment teeth or implant abutments adjacent to the space.
- **Bruxism:** The involuntary clenching or grinding of the teeth.

C

- **Calculus:** The hard deposit of mineralized plaque that forms on the crown and /or root of the tooth. Also referred to as tartar.
- **Canine tooth:** The second tooth from the big front tooth, commonly called the eye tooth.
- **Cantilever Extension:** Part of a fixed prosthesis that is supported at one end only.
- **Cap:** Another term for crown; usually referring to a crown for a front tooth.
- **Caries:** The correct technical term for decay which is the progressive breaking down or dissolving of tooth structure, caused by the acid produced when bacteria digest sugars.
- **Cavity:** A layman's term for decay. Also, the dental term for the hole that is left after the decay has been removed.
- **Cement:** A special type of glue used to hold a crown in it's place. It also acts as an insulator to protect the tooth's nerve.
- **Cementum:** The very thin, bonelike structure that covers the root of the tooth.
- **Clenching:** The forceful holding together of the upper and lower teeth, which places stress on the ligaments that hold the teeth to the jawbone and the lower jaw to the skull.
- **Complex rehabilitation:** The extensive dental restoration involving 6 or more units of crown and/or bridge in the same treatment plan. Using full crowns and/or fixed bridges which are cemented in place, that your dentist will rebuild natural teeth, fill in spaces where teeth are missing and establish conditions which allow each tooth to function in harmony with the occlusion (bite).
- **Composite:** A tooth-colored filling made of plastic resin or porcelain.
- **Consultation:** A diagnostic service provided by a dentist other than the treating dentist.
- **Cosmetic dentistry:** Any dental treatment or repair that is solely rendered to improve the appearance of the teeth or mouth.
- **Crown:** The portion of a tooth that is covered by enamel. Also a dental restoration that covers the entire tooth and restores it to its original shape.
- **Crown lengthening:** A surgical procedure exposing more of the tooth for restorative purposes.
- **Curettage:** A deep scaling of that portion of the tooth below the gum line. Purpose is to remove calculus and infected gum tissue.
- **Cuspid:** See canine tooth.
- **Cusp(s):** The protruding portion(s) of a tooth's chewing surface.

D

- **Decay:** see caries
- **Deciduous:** See primary teeth
- **Dental Floss:** A thin, nylon string, waxed or unwaxed, that is inserted between the teeth to remove food and plaque.
- **Dental hygienist:** A dental professional specializing in cleaning the teeth by removing plaque, calculus, and diseased gum tissue. He/She acts as the patients guide in establishing a proper oral hygiene program.
- **Dentin:** The part of the tooth that is under both the enamel which covers the crown and the cementum which covers the root.
- **Dentition:** The teeth in the dental arch.
- **Denture:** A removable appliance used to replace teeth. A complete denture replaces all of the upper teeth and/or all the lower teeth.
- **DDS:** Doctor of Dental Surgery or DDS, Doctor of Dental Medicine. Degrees given to dental school graduates. Both degrees are the same particular dental schools identify at their discretion their graduates as DMD or DDS.
- **Diastema:** A space, such as one between two adjacent teeth in the same dental arch.
- **Distal:** Farther from any part of reference.
- **Direct pulp cap:** The procedure in which the exposed pulp is covered with a dressing or cement that protects the pulp and promotes healing and repair.
- **Dry socket (osteitis):** A localized inflammation of the tooth socket following an extraction due to infection and lack of formation of a blood clot. Often due to smoking or excessive rinsing after an extraction.

E

- **Enamel:** The hard, calcified (mineralized) portion of the tooth which covers the crown. Enamel is the hardest substance in the body.
- **Endodontics:** The dental specialty that deals with injuries to or diseases of the pulp, or nerve, of the tooth.
- **Endodontist:** A dentist who deals with the cause, prevention, diagnosis, and treatment or injuries and diseases that affect the dental pulp, tooth root, and periapical tissue.
- **Equilibration:** (occlusal adjustment) The achievement of a balance between opposing teeth or forces by adjustive grinding of an interfering tooth structure during the functional stroke.
- **Extraction:** The removal of a tooth.
- **Excision:** Surgical removal of bone or tissue.
- **Extosis:** The overgrowth of normal bone.

- **Extracoronaral:** The outside crown of the tooth.
- **Extraoral:** The outside of the mouth.

F

- **Facial:** Pertaining to or toward the face (Buccal, Labial).
- **Filling:** Material used to fill cavity or replace part of a tooth.
- **Fissure:** A deep ditch or cleft in the surface of the teeth.
- **Floss:** see dental floss.
- **Fluoride:** A chemical compound used to prevent dental decay, utilized in fluoridated water systems and/or applied directly to the teeth.
- **Frenum:** Muscle fibers covered by a mucus membrane that attaches the check, lips and or tongue to associated dental mucous.
- **Frenectomy:** The removal of a frenum.

G

- **Gingiva:** The soft tissue that covers the jawbone. Also referred to as the gums.
- **Gingivectomy:** Removal of excessive gingiva. May be necessary to access tooth structure during a restorative procedure.
- **Gingivitis:** An inflammation or infection of the gingiva; the initial stage of gum disease.
- **Gingivoplasty:** A surgical procedure to reshape or repair the gingiva (gum).
- **Graft:** A piece of tissue or synthetic material placed in contact with tissue to repair a defect or supplement a deficiency.
- **Gum:** see gingiva.
- **Gum Disease:** see gingiva.

H

- **Hemisection:** The surgical separation of a multirooted tooth through the furcation area in such a way that the blocked, defective, or periodontally affected root or roots may be removed along with the associated portion of the crown.
- **High noble metal:** See metal, classification of.

I

- **Immediate denture:** A denture constructed for immediate placement after removal of the remaining teeth.
- **Impacted tooth:** An unerupted or partially erupted tooth that is positioned against bone or soft tissue so that total eruption is unlikely.

- **Implant:** An artificial device, usually made of a metal alloy or ceramic material, that is implanted within the jawbone as a means to attach an artificial crown, denture, or bridge.
- **Incipient:** Dental carries in an early stage of development, often not requiring immediate restorations.
- **Incisal:** Pertaining to the cutting edges of incisor and cuspid teeth.
- **Incision and Drain:** (I and D) A sweeping incision made through the core of a lesion to allow draining of infection, and removal of any abnormal or unhealthy tissue.
- **Indirect pulp cap:** A procedure in which the nearly exposed pulp is covered with a protective dressing to protect the pulp from additional injury and to promote healing and repair via formation of secondary dentin.
- **Inlay:** A cast gold filling that is used to replace part of the tooth.
- **Interproximal:** The area between two adjacent teeth.
- **Intracoronary:** The area within a crown of a tooth.
- **Intraoral:** The inside of a mouth.

L

- **Labial:** The area pertaining to or around the lip.
- **Lingual:** The area pertaining to or around the tongue.
- **Local Anesthetic:** The injection given in the mouth to numb the areas where a tooth or area needs a dental procedure. Often referred to as Novocain.

M

- **Malocclusion:** The improper alignment of biting or chewing surfaces of upper and lower teeth.
- **Mandible:** The lower jaw.
- **Maryland bridge:** The trade name that becomes synonymous with any resin bonded fixed partial denture (bridge).
- **Mastication:** The act of chewing.
- **Maxilla:** The upper jaw.
- **Mesial:** Toward or situated in the middle.
- **Metals, classification of:** The noble metal classification system has been adopted as a more precise method of reporting various alloys in dentistry commonly used in crowns, bridges, and dentures. These alloys contain varying percentages of Gold, Palladium, and/or Platinum. High noble contains more than 60% of Gold, Palladium and/or Platinum (with at least 40% Gold); noble contains more than 25% Gold, Palladium and/or Platinum; predominately base less than 25% Gold, Palladium and/or Platinum.

- **Molars:** The broad, multicusped back teeth, used for grinding food are considered the largest teeth in the mouth. In adults there are a total of twelve molars (including the four wisdom teeth, or third molars), three on each side of the upper and lower jaws.

N

- **Nitrous oxide:** A controlled mixture of nitrogen and oxygen gases (N₂O) that is inhaled by the patient in order to decrease sensitivity to pain. Also referred to as laughing gas.
- **Novocain:** A generic name for the many kinds of anesthetics used in the dental injection, such as Xylocaine, Lidocaine, or Novocaine. See local anesthetic.

O

- **Occlusal x-ray:** An intraoral x-ray taken with the film held between the teeth in biting position.
- **Occlusal surface:** The chewing surface of the back teeth.
- **Occlusion:** Any contact between biting or chewing surfaces of upper and lower teeth.
- **Onlay:** A cast gold or porcelain filling that covers one or all of the tooth's cusps.
- **Oral surgery:** The removal of teeth and the repair and treatment of other oral problems, such as tumors and fractures.
- **Orthodontics:** A specialized branch of dentistry that corrects malocclusion and restores the teeth to proper alignment and function. There are several different types of appliances used in orthodontics, one of which is commonly referred to as braces.
- **Overbite:** A condition in which the upper teeth excessively overlap the lower teeth when the jaw is closed. This condition can be corrected with orthodontics.

P

- **Palate:** The hard and soft tissues forming the roof of the mouth.
- **Palliative:** Treatment that relieves pain but is NOT curative.
- **Panorex:** An extraoral full-mouth X-ray that records the teeth and the upper and lower jaws on one film.
- **Partial denture:** A removable appliance used to replace one or more lost teeth.
- **Periodontist:** The area of dentistry concerned with the prevention, diagnostic, and treatment of periodontal disease.

- **Pediatric dentistry:** The specialized branch of dentistry that deals solely with treating the children's dental disease. Also referred to as Pedodontics.
- **Periapical:** The area that surrounds the tip of a tooth.
- **Pericoronitis:** An inflammation of the gum tissue around the crown of a tooth, usually the third molar.
- **Periodontal:** Relating to the tissue and bone that supports the tooth (from peri, meaning "around", and dont , "tooth").
- **Periodontal disease:** The inflammation and infection of the gums, ligaments, bone, and other tissues surrounding the teeth. Gingivitis and periodontitis are the two main forms of periodontal disease.
- **Periodontal pocket:** An abnormal deepening of the gingival crevice. It is caused when disease and infection destroy the ligament that attaches the gum to the tooth and the underlying bone.
- **Periodontal surgery:** A surgical procedure involving the gums and jawbone. Intended to reduce periodontal disease.
- **Periodontics:** The dental specialty that deals with and treats the gum tissue and bone that supports the teeth. Includes implant placement.
- **Periodontitis:** Inflammation of the supporting structures of the tooth, including the gum, the periodontal ligament, and the jawbone.
- **Periradicular:** The area which surrounds a portion of the root of the tooth.
- **Permanent teeth:** The thirty-two adult teeth that replace the baby , or primary teeth. Also known as secondary teeth.
- **Pit:** A recessed area found on the surface of a tooth, usually where e the grooves of the tooth meet.
- **Plaque:** A film of sticky material containing saliva, food particles, and bacteria that attaches to the tooth surface both above and below the gum line. When left on the tooth it can promote gum disease and decay.
- **Pontic:** An artificial tooth used in a bridge to replace a missing tooth.
- **Post and core:** An elongated metallic projection fitted and cemented within the prepared root canal, serving to strengthen and retain restorative material and/or a crown restoration.
- **Premolar:** Another name for bicuspid.
- **Preventative dentistry:** Education and treatment devoted to and concerned with preventing the development of dental disease.
- **Preventative treatment:** Any action taken by the patient, assisted by the dentist, hygienist, and the office staff that serves to prevent dental or other disease. Seal ants, cleanings and space maintainers are examples of preventative treatment.
- **Primary teeth:** The first set of teeth that humans get, lasting until the permanent teeth come in. Also referred to as baby teeth.
- **Prophylaxis:** The scaling and polishing procedure performed to remove calculus, plaque, and stains from the crowns of the teeth.

- **Prosthesis:** (DENTAL) Any device or appliance replacing one or more missing teeth.
- **Prosthodontics:** The dental specialty dealing with the replacement of missing teeth and other oral structures.
- **Pulp:** The hollow chamber inside the crown of the tooth that contains its nerves and blood vessels.
- **Pulpotomy:** The removal of a portion of the tooth's pulp.

Q

- **Quadrant:** The dental term for the division of the jaws onto four parts, beginning at the midline of the arch and extending towards the last tooth in the back of the mouth. There are four quadrants in the mouth; each quadrant generally contains five to eight teeth.

R

- **Rebase:** The process of refitting a denture by replacing the base material.
- **Receded gums:** A condition characterized by the abnormal loss of gum tissue due to infection or bone loss.
- **Referral:** When a dental patient is sent to another dentist, usually a specialist, for treatment or consultation.
- **Reline:** The process of resurfacing the tissue side of a denture with a base material.
- **Replantation:** The return of a tooth to its socket.
- **Resorption:** The breakdown and assimilation of the bone that supports the tooth, i.e., bone loss.
- **Restoration:** Any material or device used to replace lost tooth structure (filling, crown) or to replace a lost tooth or teeth (bridge, dentures, complete or partial).
- **Retainer:** A removable dental appliance, usually used in orthodontics, that maintains space between teeth or holds teeth in a fixed position until the bone solidifies around them.
- **Retrograde filling:** A method of sealing the root canal by preparing and filling it from the root tip, generally done at the completion of an apicoectomy.
- **Ridge enhancement:** (bone replacement) The placement of a synthetic bone material, or freeze dried bone, inserted immediately after an extraction into the socket of the tooth. This is done to prevent collapsing of the surrounding bone.
- **Root:** The part of the tooth below the crown, normally encased in the jawbone. It is made up of dentin, includes the root canal, and is covered by cementum.
- **Root Canal:** The hollow part of the tooth's root. It runs from the tip of the root into the pulp.

- **Root canal therapy:** The process of treating disease or inflammation of the pulp or root canal. This involves removing the pulp and root's nerve(s) and filling the canal(s) with an appropriate material to permanently seal it.
- **Root planing:** The process of scaling and planing exposed root surfaces to remove all calculus, plaque, and infected tissue.

S

- **Scaling:** A procedure used to remove plaque, calculus, and stains from the teeth.
- **Sealant:** A composite material used to seal the decay-prone pits, fissures, and grooves of teeth to prevent decay.
- **Six-year molar:** The first permanent tooth to erupt, usually between the ages of five and six.
- **Socket:** The hole in the jawbone in which the tooth fits.
- **Space maintainer:** A dental appliance that fills the space of a lost tooth or teeth and prevents the other teeth from moving into the space. Used especially in orthodontic and pedodontic treatment.
- **Stainless steel crown:** A pre-made metal crown, shaped like a tooth, that is used to temporarily cover a seriously decayed or broken down tooth. Used most often on children's teeth.
- **Subgingival scaling:** The removal of calculus and plaque found on the tooth below the gum line.
- **Supra gingival scaling:** The removal of calculus and plaque found on the tooth above the gum line.
- **Systemic:** Relating to the whole body.

T

- **Tartar:** see calculus.
- **Temporomandibular joint (TMJ):** The connecting hinge mechanism between the upper jaw and the base of the skull.
- **Third molar:** The last of the three molar teeth, also called wisdom teeth. There are four third molars, two in the lower jaw two in the upper jaw, on each side.
- **Torus:** A bony elevation of normal bone. Usually seen on the upper palate behind the front teeth or under the tongue inside the lower jaw.
- **Treatment plan:** A list of work that the dentist proposes to perform on a dental patient based on the results of the x-rays, exam, and diagnosis. Often more than one treatment plan is presented.

V

- **Veneer:** An artificial filling material, usually plastic, composite, or porcelain, that is used to provide an aesthetic covering over the visible surface of a tooth. Most often used on front teeth.

W

- **Wisdom teeth:** See third molar.
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CLASSIFICATIONS OF DENTAL CARIES

CLASS I - occlusal decay

CLASS II - interproximal decay

CLASS III - on anterior teeth, interproximal surfaces, but not involving the incisal surface.

CLASS IV - lesion on the interproximal surface and involving the incisal surface of the incisor or cuspid

CLASS V - caries on the gingival 1/3 of the tooth, and below the height of contour on the labial, facial, and lingual surfaces of the teeth.

CLASS VI - cavities in the incisal edges and smooth surfaces of teeth above the height of contour.