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Comprehensive medical centre

DENTAL X-RAYS

Q. Why would I need an x-ray?

A. Early tooth decay does not tend to show many physical signs. Sometimes the tooth looks healthy, but your dental team will be able to see from an x-ray whether you have any decay under the enamel, any possible infections in the root, or any bone loss around the tooth.

X-rays can help the dental team to see in between your teeth or under the edge of your fillings. Finding and treating dental problems at an early stage can save both time and money.

In children, x-rays can be used to show where the adult teeth are and when they will appear. They are also used in the same way for adults when the wisdom teeth start to come through.

Q. How often should I have x-rays?

A. If you are a new patient, unless you have had dental x-rays very recently, the dental team will probably suggest having x-rays. This helps them assess the condition of your mouth and to check for any hidden problems. After that, x-rays may be recommended every 6 to 24 months depending on the person, their history of decay, their age and the condition of their mouth.

Q. Who do the x-rays belong to?

A. X-rays are an essential part of your health records. If you are entitled to copies of your records, you may have to pay for these copies. If you change dentists, your x-rays and records will not usually be needed by your new dentist. However, if they are important, your new dental team will let you know. They will either ask for your permission to send for them, or ask you to fetch them yourself.

Q. What will an x-ray show?

A. X-rays can show decay that may not be seen directly in the mouth: for example, under a filling, or between the teeth. They can show whether you have an infection in the root of your tooth and how severe the infection is.

In children an x-ray can show any teeth that haven't come through yet, and show the dental team whether there is enough space for the teeth to come through. In adults, it can show any impacted wisdom teeth that may need to be removed, before they cause any problems.

Q. Are x-rays dangerous?

A. The amount of radiation received from a dental x-ray is extremely small. We get more radiation from natural sources, including minerals in the soil, and from our general environment.

With modern techniques and equipment, risks are kept as small as possible. However, your dental team will always take care to use x-rays only when they need to.

Q. Should I have an x-ray if I'm pregnant?

A. You should always tell your dental team if you are pregnant. They will take extra care and will probably not use x-rays unless they really have to, especially during the first three months.

Q. What types of x-rays are there?

A. There are various types of x-ray. Some show one or two teeth and their roots, while others can take pictures of several teeth at once. The most common x-rays are small ones, which are taken regularly to keep a check on the condition of the teeth and gums.

These show a few teeth at a time, but include the roots and surrounding areas. There are large x-rays that show the whole mouth, including all the teeth and the bone structure that supports the teeth.

These are called panoramic x-rays. There are also medium-sized x-rays, which show either one jaw at a time, or one side of the face. There are also electronic 'imaging' systems in use today. These use electronic probes instead of x-ray films and the picture is transmitted directly onto a screen.

Q. Why does the dentist leave the room during an x-ray?

A. The dental team might take hundreds of x-rays every week. Staff limit the amount of radiation they receive by moving away from the x-ray beam. However, the risk to patients from one or two routine x-rays is tiny. Staff check how much radiation they are exposed to by wearing a small badge during working hours. This is sent off to be checked at regular intervals.

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