EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT DENTAL ASSISTING
NATURE OF WORK

Dental assistants are not the same as dental hygienists in that they do not perform clinical tasks. Dental assistants work under the supervision of dentists and perform patient care, office, and laboratory duties.

Dental assistant tasks include: disinfecting instruments and equipment, obtaining dental records, providing the dentist with assistance, scheduling appointments, receiving patients, sending bills, and receiving payments. They also instruct patients on general oral health care.

In some offices, dental assistants prepare materials for impressions, make casts of teeth, take x-rays, process x-ray film, and make temporary crowns.

There are dental assistants who perform strictly office duties, laboratory duties, patient care or a bit of all three. Here is a day in the life of dental assistants [3].

Dental Assistant who performs patient care:

• Make patients as comfortable as possible in the dental chair, prepare them for treatment, and obtain dental records
• Hand instruments and materials to dentists, and keep patients’ mouths dry and clear using suction devices
• Sterilize and disinfect instruments and equipment, prepare tray setups for dental procedures, and instruct patients on postoperative and general oral health care
• Prepare materials for making impressions and restorations, expose radiographs, and process dental x-ray film
• Remove sutures, apply anesthetics to gums or cavity-preventive agents to teeth remove excess cement and place rubber dams on teeth to isolate them for individual treatment

Dental Assistant who performs laboratory duties:

• Make casts of teeth and mouth from impressions
• Clean and polish removable appliances

QUICK FACTS

• Dental assistants are not the same as dental hygienists. They do not perform clinical tasks. Dental assistants work under the supervision of dentists and perform patient care, office, and laboratory duties.
• The average annual salary is $37,000 [1].
• In order to become a dental assistant a 10-12 month training program with an earned certificate at the end is required.
• Dental Assisting careers are projected to increase 29% in the next six years.
• You can apply to start training in this exciting field.
- Make temporary crowns
- Schedule and confirm appointments
- Receive patients
- Keep treatment records
- Send bills and receive payments
- Order supplies and material

**TRAINING & EDUCATION**

In order to become a dental assistant, you must have a high school diploma or equivalent. After you have completed your GED, a training course approved by the American Dental Association (ADA) and licensure are required. There are roughly 256 dental assisting programs in the US that are approved by the American Dental Association (ADA) [4].

Dental assisting training programs usually take less than one year to complete, typically between 10-12 months. You may also want to participate in a two-year associate's degree program if you are considering gaining more education later on.

You can train in dental assisting in community colleges, dental schools, technical institutions, universities and vocational schools. Some vocational schools out there offer 4-6 month courses; however, these are not accredited by the Commission of Dental Accreditation.

Those accredited by the CDA, require students to take an exam for licensure. The exam is four hours long and has 320 questions. These questions are broken down into 3 sections: [5]

- General chairside test- 120 questions
- Radiation health and safety- 100 questions
- Infection control test- 100 questions

Training programs include learning about dental terminology, name of instruments, how to perform daily duties, how to interact with patients, and the key to keeping the office running smoothly [2].

Licensure varies from state to state. Some states require you to pass a test in order to get certified or
licensure. Other states require that you take a state-approved education course that is 4-12 hours in length. Other states allow you to begin working as a dental assistant while earning your certificate at the same time.

You can also receive certification through the Dental Assisting National Board (DANB), which is recognized in more than 30 states. You only qualify for this certification if you complete and ADA-accredited program first.

The nice thing about these programs is that the costs are mostly reimbursed by dental offices you will work in.

EMPLOYMENT

Most dental assistants work 35 to 40 hour weeks, and a lot of assistants choose to only work part time. They work in dental offices. Dental assistants work near the dentist chairs, offering help to the dentist when needed. They usually wear masks, gloves, and eyewear for protection throughout the work day.

JOB OUTLOOK

Dental assisting jobs are projected to increase 29% in the next six years. This percentage is faster than average compared to all other occupations [2]. This in mind, job prospects are excellent. Numerous job openings will be available and job security intact.

JOB UPLOOK

Dental assistants can go on to become office managers, dental-assisting instructors, dental product sales reps, and insurance claims processors for dental insurance companies. With more schooling, many go on to become dental hygienists.
EARNINGS

According to indeed.com [1], the average annual income for dental assistants is currently $37,000. The top 10% earn $40,000 annually or more [6]. This is just the average. Salaries vary with education, training, experience, and job location.

Along with competitive pay, dental assistants earn great benefits including health, medical, dental, paid sick leave, paid vacation, paid holidays, 401(k), and uniform allowance. Another perk is that almost 88% of all dentists offer reimbursement for training and continuing education classes [2].

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average Earnings by Experience [8]</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$19,998 - $34,517</td>
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<tr>
<td>$19,844 - $30,156</td>
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<tr>
<td>$22,797 - $33,347</td>
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<td>$23,871 - $35,060</td>
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<td>$34,351 - $40,888</td>
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<tr>
<th>Average salary by state [9]</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
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<tr>
<td>California</td>
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<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
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<td>$21,600 - $42,564</td>
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<tr>
<td>$22,100 - $33,089</td>
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<td>$27,113 - $37,004</td>
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Links:

American Dental Assistants Association (ADAA): http://www.dentalassistant.org/
American Dental Association: http://www.ada.org/public/careers/team/assistant.asp
Dental Assisting National Board: http://www.danb.org

References


