

## Picture-Perfect Smiles: The Lowdown on **Dental X-rays** (radiographs) for a Healthy Mouth!

**Q**

**What are dental x-rays or radiographs and why are they important?**

**A**

Dental radiographs, referred to as x-rays, are pictures that allow your dentist to see what's happening under your gums and in other areas of your mouth that are not visible to the eye by your dental team. High energy radiation penetrates the body to create images in either digital format or developed on film.<sup>2</sup>

X-rays help evaluate your teeth and supporting tissues (gums and bone). They can help diagnose dental disease. If you are experiencing pain or another dental problem, radiographs may be recommended. X-rays can look for tooth decay, infection to the bone, periodontal disease and in children to see adult (secondary) teeth before erupting.<sup>1</sup>

**Q**

**Are dental x-rays safe and how am I protected?**

**A**

Dental x-rays are safe but do expose you to low levels of radiation.<sup>1</sup> Your dentist will take every precaution to minimize your exposure to radiation using the lowest radiation exposure possible to achieve the needed result.<sup>1</sup> Your dentist may use a leaded apron and/or a leaded thyroid shield to further limit your exposure.<sup>1</sup> Dental x-rays taken using digital technology use less radiation than traditional developed film.<sup>2</sup>

Inform your dentist if you are pregnant, but understand it is completely safe to get x-rays during pregnancy according to the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecologists.<sup>1</sup>

Q

## What are the different kinds of dental x-rays?

A

Four most common types of dental radiographs are:

1. **Bitewing** - shows the crown portions of the top and bottom teeth together, you will be asked to bite on tab to take this x- ray, generally taken in sets of two or four at annual check-up visits.
2. **Periapical** - shows one or two complete teeth from crown to root (the entire tooth above and below the gum tissue), typically taken when you have pain to help diagnose what is happening. Often taken of all the teeth in combination with bitewings when first starting with a new dentist to get a baseline status of the mouth.
3. **Palatal (also called occlusal)** - shows all the upper and lower teeth in one shot, the film rests on the biting surface when capturing this xray.
4. **Panoramic** - a special x-ray machine rotates around your head capturing the entire bone structure, teeth and supporting tissue in one picture. It's generally used to plan treatment for dental implants, check for impacted wisdom teeth, and detect jaw problems.

Q

## What questions should I ask my dentist about radiographs?

A

1. Based on your assessment of my risk for dental disease and my health, what type and how often should I expect to need x-rays?
2. Do you have digital technology or develop film?
3. What safety precautions do you use to limit my radiation exposure?
4. What do my x-rays show?

1. American Dental Association, Mouth Healthy, "X-rays (Radiographs)," <http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/x/x-rays>. Accessed 06.27.2024.

2. National Institute of Health, MedLinePlus. "Dental X-Rays," <https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003801.htm> Accessed 06.27.2024.

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