

Benefits Spotlight

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Tools of the Trade

Just like an engineer or a seamstress, dentists have a host of tools that help them do their jobs. Though these instruments are designed to make dental work easier and more efficient, they can look a little intimidating to patients – especially patients who experience dental anxiety.

Understanding procedures can help relieve some of that apprehension – and it also helps to remember that your dentist and hygienist have gone through extensive training to know how to use these tools properly and effectively. Here are a few of the common dental tools are used to keep your smile healthy:

Mirror

About the size of a quarter, a dental mirror is usually positioned on an angle at the end of a small handle. They help show dentists hard-to-see spots in the mouth such as the back of teeth. They can also reflect light into the mouth to provide better visibility.

Dental Explorer and Periodontal Probe

These little instruments are appropriately named – they allow the dentist to explore further into mouths. They're used to check for plaque and tartar below the gum line, identify cavities, measure gum pockets and more.

Drill

The dental drill, which is properly called a dental hand piece, is used to remove tooth decay, get teeth ready for fillings or crowns, and smooth or polish teeth. Dental procedures that use a drill require anesthesia, so you won't feel any pain while your tooth is being prepared. This tool makes a loud noise, but there's no need to worry. If the sound really bothers you, ask your dentist if you can listen to music on headphones as a distraction.

Excavator

Dental excavators are small tools that help your dentist remove decay to prepare teeth for fillings or other dental work. If your dentist is using these tools, your mouth has already been numbed with anesthesia – you won't feel a thing.

Dental Scaler

This tool scrapes stains and tartar from the teeth and roots to help prevent gum disease.

So next time you are sitting in the exam chair, take a look to see how many you can identify!

History of Oral Health: Teeth and the Military

As we celebrate the great men and women who have served our country, we'd like to highlight a lesser known history in our military—the role that dentistry has played in it. Here are some real (and wild) stories of teeth in the armed services.

A soldier once noted that General Ulysses S. Grant took almost nothing with him on military campaigns – no tent, no clean clothing, no blankets – but he did bring a toothbrush.

During the Civil War, men missing any of their four front teeth were unable to serve since those teeth were required to quickly open gunpowder pouches. Some men had their front teeth removed to avoid being drafted.

The U.S. Army Dental Corps, the very first armed services dental collective, was established in 1911.

In April of 1917, at the beginning of World War I, there were 86 active duty army dental officers. By November of that same year, the number of dentists serving spiked to 4,620!

During World War I, soldiers developed a severe form of gum disease called “trench mouth,” which resulted from a lack of oral care while in the field (often in trenches) for long periods of time.

World War II soldiers received special chocolate bars in their rations, but not to satisfy sweet cravings. Intended only for nutrition and an 1,800 calorie-punch of energy, the bars were designed to taste ‘a little better than a boiled potato’.