

# Dental hygienist

Dental hygienists are an important part of the dental team, preventing dental problems in adults and children.

## Working life

You'll help children and adults look after their teeth and gums. Sometimes you might be working on a one-to-one basis while on occasion you'll work with groups of people.



You'll carry out procedures such as:

- scaling teeth (at times under local anaesthetic)
- polishing teeth
- applying topical fluoride and fissure sealants

You are likely to work in general dental practices but there are job opportunities in hospitals and community dental services .

Your work as a dental hygienist will save teeth by preventing and treating gum disease, helping people get rid of associated problems like bad breath. The dentist will usually advise you and help direct your work, although it's now possible for hygienists and therapists who have extra training to set up their own practices or work independently in a dental practice so they can see patients without them seeing a dentist first.

In the community, you could work with people with a wide range of special or additional needs. If you are based in a hospital, you will help patients who may have had major surgery or complicated orthodontic treatment or have particular medical conditions. The hospital patients you see may be very ill, apprehensive or unsure after life-changing surgery.

**Jessica Gardham**

## Student dental hygienist

I'd like to inspire others who are over the age of 30 to retrain. I am 41 and about to start my career as a dental hygienist so it can be done!

[Read Jessica's story](#) <sup>[1]</sup>

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## Entry requirements, skills and interests

You'll need five GCSE subjects graded 4-7 or A-C, plus two or three A levels (depending on the university) or a recognised dental nursing qualification to get on to a dental hygiene course. Good people and communication skills are very important and as you might work in different settings, you'll need to enjoy a job with plenty of variety.

## Training

To practise as a dental hygienist, you need to take a course approved by the [General Dental Council \(GDC\)](#) <sup>[2]</sup> and then need to register with the GDC.

Subjects studied include:

- anatomy and physiology <sup>[3]</sup>
- preventive dentistry
- dental health education
- dental pathology
- the management and care of patients

Several dental schools offer courses combining dental hygiene and dental therapy.

If you are studying a dental hygiene course at level 5 or 6 then you may be eligible for at least £5,000 a year towards your studies while at university. Your personal circumstances may mean you could receive more. And the good news? You'll never have to pay it back. [Find out more.](#) <sup>[4]</sup>

## Career development

With experience, you can progress to become a practice manager, train other dental hygienists or develop further skills such as sedation or tooth whitening. You could also work as an orthodontic therapist.

## Pay and benefits

Dental hygienists may be self-employed or employed directly by a dental practice so your working hours and pay will vary but some evening or weekend work may be required.

If you work for the the NHS in a hospital or community clinic, your starting salary might be at bands 5 or 6 of the [Agenda for Change](#) <sup>[5]</sup> pay scale. You'll typically work 37.5 hours a week.

## • Find your course to become a dental hygienist

Region

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Type of qualification

- Any -

Full or part time

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### Oral Health Science

Glasgow Caledonian University

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- Qualification

BSc

- Study mode

Full-time

- Duration of the course

3 years

- Leading to a career in

Dental hygiene or therapy

- Contact details

[studentenquiries@gcu.ac.uk](mailto:studentenquiries@gcu.ac.uk) <sup>[7]</sup>

0141 331 8630

- Region

Scotland

- Admissions address

Cowcaddens Road

Glasgow

G4 0BA

### Dental hygiene DipHE

Bangor University

[View course](#) <sup>[8]</sup> Opens in a new window

- Study mode

Full-time

- Duration of the course

2 years

- Leading to a career in

Dental hygiene or therapy

- Contact details

[admissions@bangor.ac.uk](mailto:admissions@bangor.ac.uk) <sup>[9]</sup>

+44 (0) 1248351151

- Region

Wales

- Admissions address

Bangor,  
Gwynedd,  
LL57 2DG,  
UK

## Oral health science BSc

University of Dundee

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- Qualification  
BSc
- Study mode  
Full-time
- Duration of the course  
3 years
- Leading to a career in  
Dental hygiene or therapy
- Contact details  
+44 (0)1382 383838
- Region  
Scotland
- Admissions address  
University of Dundee  
Nethergate  
Dundee  
DD1 4HN  
Scotland, UK
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For more NHS vacancies, visit [NHS Jobs](#) <sup>[11]</sup>.

## Find a vacancy

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## Other roles that may interest you

- [Dental nurse](#) <sup>[12]</sup>
- [Dental support worker](#) <sup>[13]</sup>
- [Dentist](#) <sup>[14]</sup>
- [Dental technician/dental technologist](#) <sup>[15]</sup>

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### Links

[1] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/dental-team/roles-dental-team/dental-hygienist/real-life-story-jessica-gardham> [2] <http://www.gdc-uk.org/Pages/default.aspx> [3] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Physiology> [4] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/career-planning/study-and-training/considering-or-university/financial-support-university> [5] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/working-health/working-nhs/nhs-pay-and-benefits/agenda-change-pay-rates> [6] <https://www.gcu.ac.uk/study/courses/details/index.php/P02679> [7] <mailto:studentenquiries@gcu.ac.uk> [8] <https://www.bangor.ac.uk/courses/undergraduate/b751-dental-hygiene-diphe> [9] <mailto:admissions@bangor.ac.uk> [10] <https://www.dundee.ac.uk/undergraduate/oral-health-sciences> [11] <https://www.jobs.nhs.uk/#Homepage> [12] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/dental-team/roles-dental-team/dental-nurse> [13] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/Explore-roles/wider-healthcare-team/roles-wider-healthcare-team/clinical-support-staff/dental-support-worker> [14] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/dental-team/roles-dental-team/dentist> [15] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/dental-team/roles-dental-team/dental-techniciandental-technologist>