

# Dental Terminology

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**Please take a moment to learn more about these dental industry terms.**

**Abscess** – An empty “pocket” within the gum caused by an infection, marked by softness and a red color. Abscesses are typically 1 millimeter or larger.

**Amalgam Filling** – A combination of silver, tin, copper, zinc and mercury that is affixed over a cavity. We do not use these filling types, though we recognize they remain a safe and protective treatment against tooth decay.

**Arestin** – A powdered form of minocycline, which prevents bacterial colonies from recolonizing an infected area. Arestin is considered a localized antibiotic therapy.

**Bite** – the formation made when the upper and lower sets of teeth meet, which can be susceptible to excessive wear and/or damage to the teeth.

**Care Credit** – A financing program which allows patients to establish monthly payment plans that offer a low or zero percent interest rate.

**Composite Resin Filling** – Tooth-colored fillings that are bonded to the tooth.

**CPAP** – A continuous positive airway pressure appliance that provides a constant flow of pressurized air via a fitted mask worn by the patient during sleep.

**Dental Exam** – An evaluation of current dental health that includes observation, patient questions and x-rays.

**Dental Prophylaxis** – A procedure performed by a dentist or dental hygienist to remove plaque, tartar and stains from the teeth using hand instruments or ultrasonic instruments called scalers. Tools are moved along teeth surfaces in order to dislodge plaque or tartar buildup. Otherwise known as a dental cleaning.

**Denture** – A removable type of dental restoration that rests on the gum tissue. Dentures are used to replace multiple missing teeth.

**Diagnostic Services** – Procedures that are performed to help detect or assess the risk for any dental disease. These procedures also evaluate for the presence of infection, cancer, or any abnormal cysts or growths that can occur in the mouth. Diagnostic services include exams and dental x-rays.

**Fluoride** – A naturally-occurring ion, which exists in food and certain water sources, which has been shown to significantly reduce the incidence of cavities in children and adults.

**Gingivitis** – A condition where a patient either has 4mm pockets between teeth and gums OR 1-3mm pockets with apparent bleeding.

**Oral Cancer Screening** – A visual examination of the soft tissue within the mouth for the purpose of identifying abnormal growth and/or coloring.

**Periodontist** – A dental specialist who treats periodontitis and other gum diseases.

**Periodontal Disease** – A condition that affects the gums which can range from simple gum inflammation to serious damage to the soft tissue and bone that support the teeth. Also known as gum disease.

**Periodontal Pocket** – the area where the gum meets the tooth.

**Plaque** – A dense, pale yellow film formed by colonizing bacteria, which develops on teeth. Plaque can be removed with a dental cleaning.

**Porcelain Bridge** – A composite used to fill an empty space in the mouth where a tooth has been removed. The bridge is affixed to the adjacent teeth to prevent fracturing and other damage.

**Porcelain Crown** – A cap which covers the entire tooth, helping to restore its proper size, shape and position. A crown may be recommended for large cavities, tooth fracture or a tooth that has had a root canal procedure.

**Porcelain Veneer** – A thin layer of porcelain bonded to the front surface of the tooth, used to close spaces between teeth, correct misaligned teeth, cover severely stained or discolored teeth or to restore severely chipped teeth.

**Preventative Care** – Dental procedures that are performed to help prevent dental diseases such as cavities or gum disease. Preventative services include cleanings, sealants, and fluoride treatments.

**Pulpotomy** – A procedure, typically administered to children, which removes a cavity along with the top portion of pulp within the tooth.

**Scalers** – Ultrasonic hand-held tools which remove plaque, tartar and other buildup.

**Sealant** – A protective coating that is placed on the biting surface of molar teeth to help prevent tooth decay

**Tartar** – A hardened accumulation of plaque caused by saliva residue buildup on teeth over time.

**Temporomandibular joint (TMJ)** – the connection between the jaw bone and skull which is critical to biting and chewing.

**Tooth Bonding** – A cosmetic procedure performed on the front teeth used to correct small chips, close small spaces or change the shape of the tooth.

**Tooth Recontouring** – A cosmetic procedure performed on the front teeth whereby a hand tool and polishing instrument are used to smooth chips in the edges, making them more rounded or square.

**Tooth Decay** – A condition where bacteria de-mineralizes the tooth, leaving it soft instead of hard. This condition usually occurs as a result of acidic toxins which break down the tooth's enamel. Also called cavity or caries.

**Tooth Whitening** – A procedure where a gel containing hydrogen peroxide is applied to the tooth over 2-4 applications, resulting in brighter, whiter teeth.