

Dental Radiographs

Early dental decay does not always show physical signs in your mouth and you may not be aware that you have a problem. A tooth may look healthy, but an x-ray can be used to show the dental surgeon if any dental decay is going on under the enamel surface of the tooth, if there is any infection present, or any bone loss around the tooth. X-rays can help the dentist see between the teeth and around the edge of fillings. Finding and treating problems early can save treatment and money later.

In children, x-rays can be used to show where the second teeth are and when they will come through. This also applies to adults when their wisdom teeth start to come through.

If you are a new patient, unless you have had dental x-rays very recently, your dental surgeon will probably suggest that you have x-rays taken in order to assess the condition of your dental health and to check for any hidden problems. After that, x-rays are usually recommended every 6-24 months depending on the person, their history of dental decay, their age and the current condition of their mouth.

X-rays are an essential part of your health records and must be kept with your personal dental file. As dental records work differently to normal health records, your dentist must keep your dental records for at least two years from the date of your last course of treatment. You are entitled to copies of your x-rays under the Freedom of Information Act but you usually have to pay for these.

The amount of radiation received from a dental x-ray is extremely small. With modern techniques and equipment, risks are kept to a minimum. Your dentist will also take care to use x-rays only when necessary.

There are different types of radiographic equipment and these produce different types of dental x-rays.

Some show one tooth, some show more than one tooth and each tooth root, some show below the gum level and the bone structure that supports the teeth.



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Some systems now use electronic imaging systems that use a sensor rather than an x-ray film. The picture is sent directly to a computer and displayed almost simultaneously on a screen so that both the dental surgeon and patient can view it there. This practice has digital x-ray facilities.

The dentist will leave the room when your x-ray is taken. The dental team take hundreds of x-rays and therefore to minimize the amount of radiation they are exposed to, they leave the room to move away from the x-ray beam.

You should always tell your dentist if you are pregnant. Dental radiographs, when needed, should be taken normally in pregnancy, unlike years ago when they had to be avoided. However, our dentists will be very cautious before advising a radiograph or dental treatment in pregnancy.