

Dental Hygienist or Therapist

Dental hygienists carry out a range of treatments for patients, to protect teeth and gums and prevent and treat oral disease. They also promote good oral hygiene. Hygienists do dual training which also qualifies them in dental therapy.

The Work

You could be:

- scaling and polishing teeth to remove plaque and tartar
- deep scaling teeth, particularly the roots to help prevent gum disease
- giving local anaesthetic to make treatment more comfortable
- applying special coatings and sealants to protect teeth
- taking radiographs (x-rays) and impressions of a patient's mouth at the dentist's request
- referring the patient to a dentist for further treatment
- showing patients how to look after their teeth and gums
- visiting schools and giving talks to pupils about dental hygiene
- carrying out teeth whitening (after additional training).

As a dental therapist, in addition to the above, you could also carry out some clinical work including routine fillings for adults and children, simple extractions of baby teeth and special root fillings on baby teeth.

Pay

- There is no fixed pay scale for dental hygienists.
- Employed hygienists must negotiate their pay with their employers, although the British Society of Dental Hygiene and Therapy makes annual recommendations.
- The rates for hygienists in the Community Dental Service depend on regional policy.

Under the NHS Agenda for Change pay scales a dental therapist in an NHS practice would be on Band 5, £34,494 to £42,977 a year. Specialists are on Band 6, £43,169 to £52,603 a year.

The current pay scales are from April 2025.

Conditions

- You would work in a dental surgery or hospital and may travel to visit clinics, schools and community centres or carry out home visits.
- Working hours are usually regular but can be set by the dentist.
- You may need to work some evenings and weekends, perhaps with early morning starts.
- You may be working for several dental practices at once, a few hours each every week.
- Part time work is common.
- If you work in a hospital, you may sometimes be on call.
- You would wear a white coat and sometimes other protective clothing such as gloves or a mask.

Getting In

- To qualify as a dental hygienist or therapist, you will need to take a course approved by the [General Dental Council \(GDC\)](#).
- The BSc in Oral Health Science (SCQF Level 9) is a full time degree course lasting three years. It is available at the University of Dundee, Glasgow Caledonian University and the University of the Highlands and Islands (Inverness and North, West and Hebrides campuses).
- Entry varies from 4 Highers at BBBB to ABBB. Higher Biology is usually required plus another science subject at National 5. See institution websites for details.
- An HNC (SCQF Level 7) or HND (SCQF Level 8) in Dental Nursing would also give you entry to year 1 of the degree course.
- You will require a satisfactory criminal record check from Disclosure Scotland to show that you are suitable for this type of work. Contact [Disclosure Scotland](#) for details on the type you would need.
- It is recommended, and in some cases necessary, that you provide evidence that you do not have, and have been immunised against, blood borne viruses such as Hepatitis B.

Most dental hygienists work in the National Health Service (NHS) or private surgeries and hospitals with dentists or orthodontal or periodontal specialists, but you might also find a job in industry, the armed services or the community. You might be able to work abroad. Today people tend to qualify jointly in dental hygiene and dental therapy.

What Does It Take

You should be:

- able to get on well with people from all backgrounds and of all ages
- friendly and empathetic
- able to motivate patients to take care of their teeth and change their diet
- able to concentrate
- good with your hands and able
- well organised.

You should have:

- a steady hand to be able to carry out delicate work using instruments
- patience and understanding, some people may have a fear
- excellent communication skills, to explain treatments to people.

Training

- The [General Dental Council \(GDC\)](#) requires compulsory Continuous Professional Development (CPD) of all dental care professionals (DCPs). After qualification all DCPs must keep a portfolio of the CPD they have undergone and show this to the GDC if required.
- The British Society of Dental Hygiene and Therapy (BSDHT) provides courses which are acceptable for CPD purposes.

Getting On

- You could take further specialist courses such as oral health education which may help you gain promotion.
- You could specialise in working with children or older people.
- If you work in a hospital, you may be able to train as a tutor.
- You could move into research.

Contacts

British Society of Dental Hygiene and Therapy (BSDHT)

Tel: 01788 575050

Website: www.bsdht.org.uk

X: @BSDHTUK

NHS Scotland Careers

Website: www.careers.nhs.scot

Website (2): jobs.scot.nhs.uk

Statistics

Employment Status : Not available this career.

Past Unemployment - Scotland

No Claimant statistics available for Scotland.

Predicted Employment Statistics : Not available this career.