

# Education Today / Career Tomorrow

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## Dental Assisting

Dental assistants work closely with, and under the supervision of, dentists. Assistants perform a variety of patient care, office, and laboratory duties.

The assistants also sterilize instruments and equipment, prepare instruments and materials, and obtain patients' dental records. During dental procedures, assistants work alongside the dentist to provide assistance. They hand instruments to dentists and keep patients' mouths dry and clear by using suction or other devices. They also instruct patients on general oral health care.

Dental assistants prepare materials for impressions, take dental x rays, and process x-ray film. They also may remove sutures, apply topical anesthetics to gums, and remove excess cement used in the filling process.

Laboratory duties include making casts of the teeth and mouth from impressions, cleaning and polishing removable appliances, and making temporary crowns. Those with office duties schedule and confirm appointments, receive patients, keep treatment records, send bills, receive

payments, and order dental supplies and materials.

Dental assistants work in a well-lighted, clean environment. Dental assistants must wear gloves, masks, eyewear, and protective clothing to protect themselves and their patients.

Some dental assistants have a 35- to 40-hour workweek. Most work part-time or have variable schedules.

Source:  
*The Occupational Outlook Handbook*

## Job Outlook Money Matters

Employment is expected to increase much faster than average; job prospects are expected to be excellent. Dental assistants are expected to be among the fastest growing occupations from 2006-16.

Population growth, greater retention of natural teeth by middle-aged and older people, and an increased focus on preventative dental care for younger generations will fuel demand for dental services.

Older dentists, who have been less likely to employ assistants, are leaving the occupation and will be replaced by recent graduates, who are more likely to use one or more assistant.

### Career: Dental Assistant

**Job Description:** Under the direct supervision of a dentist, assists with oral surgery and other procedures. Prepares and arranges needed tools and instruments for scheduled procedures. Hands necessary tools and equipment and provides assistance during treatment. May record findings, change barriers, or sterilize equipment.

**Salary:** \$23,350-\$34,392

For more information on how to start your career in Dental Assisting, please contact:

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## Education Needed

Many assistants learn their skills on the job, although an increasing number are trained in dental-assisting programs offered by community and junior colleges, trade schools, and technical institutes.

Students interested in a career as a dental assistant should take courses in biology, chemistry, health, and office practices. There are one year and two year dental programs offered. All programs require a high school diploma or its equivalent, and some require science or computer-related courses for admission. A period of on-the-job training is often required even for those that have completed a dental-assisting program or have some previous experience.

A large number of dental assistants learn through on-the-job training. In these situations, the employing dentist will teach the new assistant dental terminology, the names of the instruments, how to perform daily duties, how to interact with patients, and other things necessary to help keep the dental office running smoothly.

Certification is available through the Dental Assisting National Board (DANB) and is recognized or required in more than 30 States.

Dental assistants must be a second pair of hands for a dentist; therefore, dentists look for people who are reliable, work well with others, and have good manual dexterity.



## It's a Matter of Perspective

"At Manatee Technical Institute, we have a 100 percent placement rate for our graduates, as dental assistants are in such great demand. We have three classes at different levels and we teach such things as dental radiography, dental infection control, dental laboratory procedures, and chairside assisting. Students graduate with a certificate of expanded functions which qualify them to do many advanced tasks in the field." - Kimberly Bland

"I am a recent graduate of the Manatee Technical Institute Dental Assistant program. I am thankful for the extensive learning experience that I received while in the program. I now live in Tennessee and I am a Registered Dental Assistant. When I got hired, my present employer was surprised with what I knew compared to other Dental Assistants that were hired in the past. They tell me that they want me to clone myself!" -- Michael Trudel

Teacher

Student

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