Types of Dental Cleanings Explained

Shared by Dr. Michael Perona

There are three different types of dental cleaning visits, and which one you need depends on the health of your gums.

Regular Dental Cleaning (Hygiene Visit)

This is the routine cleaning most people get, usually about every 6 months. It's for people whose gums are healthy, or who have mild gum irritation (gingivitis) without any loss of the tissue or bone that holds teeth in place. Cochrane

During this visit, your hygienist cleans plaque, tartar, and stains off your teeth above the gumline and just slightly below it, then polishes your teeth. Cochrane This is often done at the same time as your regular dental checkup. Medline

Deep Cleaning (Scaling and Root Planing)

A deep cleaning is treatment, not just prevention. It's used when you have active gum disease (periodontitis), meaning the infection has started to damage the tissue or bone around your teeth. Cochrane

A deep cleaning goes further than a regular cleaning. Along with cleaning below the gumline, it also smooths the root surfaces of the teeth to remove buildup and bacteria stuck to the roots. Cochrane This helps the gum tissue heal and reattach to the tooth, and helps reduce the size of the pockets that form between your gums and teeth. It's usually paired with guidance on brushing and flossing and, if needed, help with things like quitting smoking. Periodontology … + 1 Afterward, your gums are checked again to see how well they've healed. Periodontology … + 1

Periodontal Maintenance Visits

If you've already had gum disease treated with a deep cleaning and your gums have become stable, you move into ongoing periodontal maintenance visits instead of going back to regular cleanings. Periodontology … + 1 These visits usually happen every 2 to 6 months, with the exact schedule based on your personal risk of the disease coming back.

Periodontology … + 1

Periodontal maintenance visits include everything a regular cleaning does, plus more thorough checking and care:

- A full check of your gum health, including measuring the depth of the pockets around each tooth and checking for bleeding Cochrane
- A review of your dental and health history and, when needed, x-rays Cochrane
- Cleaning both above and below the gumline, with extra attention to any areas where the disease may be coming back Cochrane

Because gum disease can come back, these maintenance visits usually continue for as long as you have your natural teeth. Periodontology … + 1

Why This Matters

In short: a regular cleaning is for keeping healthy gums healthy. A deep cleaning treats active gum disease. Periodontal maintenance keeps gum disease from coming back once it's been treated. If it's ever unclear which type of visit is right for you, that's a good thing to talk through with your clinician.

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