

## WHAT CAN I DO WITH A MAJOR IN ... **DENTAL HYGIENE**

### OCCUPATIONAL OVERVIEW:

Dental hygienists remove soft and hard deposits from teeth, teach patients how to practice good oral hygiene, and provide other preventive dental care. Hygienists examine patients' teeth and gums, recording the presence of diseases or abnormalities. They remove calculus, stains, and plaque from teeth; perform root planing as a periodontal therapy; take and develop dental x rays; and apply cavity-preventive agents such as fluorides and pit and fissure sealants. In some States, hygienists administer anesthetics; place and carve filling materials, temporary fillings, and periodontal dressings; remove sutures; and smooth and polish metal restorations.

Dental hygienists work in clean, well-lighted offices. Important health safeguards include strict adherence to proper radiological procedures and the use of appropriate protective devices when administering anesthetic gas. Dental hygienists also wear safety glasses, surgical masks, and gloves to protect themselves and patients from infectious diseases. Flexible scheduling is a distinctive feature of this occupation. Fulltime, part-time, evening, and weekend schedules are widely available.

### EMPLOYMENT/ EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS:

Dental hygienists must be licensed by the state in which they practice. To qualify for licensure in nearly all states, a candidate must graduate from an accredited dental hygiene school and pass both a written and clinical examination. The American Dental Association's Joint Commission on National Dental Examinations administers the written examination, which is accepted by all states and the District of Columbia. A minimum of an Associate degree or certificate in dental hygiene is generally required for practice in a private dental office. A Bachelor's or Master's degree usually is required for research, teaching, or clinical practice in public or school health programs. UNM offers dental hygiene degrees at both the Bachelor's and Master's levels.

### EMPLOYERS/INDUSTRIES & SUGGESTED STRATEGY:

*Please ask your Career Advisor (CDF) for identifying employers or additional resources for your occupation of choice.*

**Areas of Practice:** Clinician; Educator; Researcher; Administrator/Manager; Consumer Advocate; Change Agent; Public health

**Types of Employers:** Private dental offices and dental clinics; Federal, state, and local health departments or associated institutions; Hospitals and nursing homes; Schools or Department of Education; Private business/industry; Correctional facilities; Private and public centers for pediatric, geriatric, and other individuals or groups with special needs; Health maintenance organizations

**Suggested Strategies:** Build a strong foundation in basic science courses; Gain job shadow, part-time, or intern experience working in a dental office

### STATE AND NATIONAL WAGES (2006):

	10%	25%	Median	75%	90%
<b>United States</b>	40,500	51,200	62,800	74,200	86,500
<b>New Mexico</b>	52,500	61,400	69,300	77,600	91,200

**PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS:**

American Dental Hygienists' Association	<a href="http://www.adha.org">http://www.adha.org</a>
American Dental Association	<a href="http://www.ada.org">http://www.ada.org</a>
New Mexico Dental Hygienist's Association	<a href="http://www.nmdha.org">http://www.nmdha.org</a>
New Mexico Regulations and Licensing Board	<a href="http://www.rld.state.nm.us/Dental/index.html">http://www.rld.state.nm.us/Dental/index.html</a>
The University of New Mexico Dental Hygiene Program	<a href="http://hsc.unm.edu/som/dentalhy/index.shtml">http://hsc.unm.edu/som/dentalhy/index.shtml</a>

**OTHER INFORMATIONAL WEBSITES:**



<http://online.onetcenter.org>



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