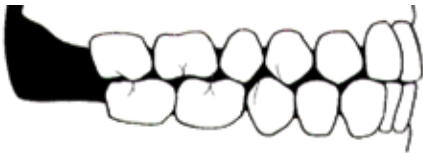


Dental X-rays – Seeing The Unseen

X-rays are an indispensable part of dentistry. The cause and extent of many problems in the mouth are just not apparent to the naked eye.

What The Eyes See



What An X-ray Can See



- A. decay between teeth
- B. hidden decay under pits and fissures
- C. decay under leaking fillings
- D. root fillings
- E. gum problems
- F. impacted wisdom teeth

When Are X-rays Useful?

- **Toothaches**
Locating the source of a toothache can be quite difficult. Dental pain has the habit of travelling from one place to another. An x-ray, often in conjunction with other tests, can help pin-point the cause.
- **Decay**
Decay between teeth, under apparently sound teeth or under old leaking fillings can present

special problems for the dentist. This type of decay is usually well hidden and can progress towards the nerve of the tooth without giving any warning signals. The big advantage of the early detection of decay is it simplifies treatment considerably.

- **Gum Disease**
Without an x-ray it is often very difficult to assess the extent of damage and therefore plan the right type of treatment.
- **Missing Teeth**
Sometimes teeth do not come through. An x-ray can help determine whether a tooth is missing or lying in the jaw bone.
- **Extracting Teeth**
A dentist may decide before extracting a tooth to x-ray the area for possible sources of trouble. An x-ray enables a dentist to plan his approach and minimize complications.
- **Root Canal Treatment**
The treatment of root canals requires the use of x-rays. They are used to show the length and shape of the root canals, the various stages of the root filling procedure and the health of the surrounding bone.
- **Accidents**
After an accident an x-ray will be needed to determine the extent of the damage. Follow-up x-rays will be required to assess healing.

How Often Do I Need X-rays?

The frequency of x-ray examination varies for individual patients. It depends on:

1. Susceptibility to decay
2. Presence of oral disease
3. If the position of teeth needs to be modified

Usually x-rays are taken in adults to check for tooth decay every two years. Those people with high decay rates will probably require more frequent x-rays.

Your dental health is affected by several factors and requires individualised and regular attention. Regular preventive treatment by your local dentist may reduce the need for x-rays.

What About Radiation Hazards?

Dentists have always been aware of the hazards of radiation and have sought a safe environment for their patients and themselves. Exposure to radiation in the dental surgery is very small in comparison with other medical radiographs. A single dental x-ray is equivalent to about 11/2 days of background radiation.

To minimise exposure dentists use:

- High speed film that shortens exposure time.
- Filters that eliminate unnecessary exposure.
- Devices that restrict the x-ray beam to a small area.
- Shielded, open ended cones that greatly limit scattered radiation.
- Precise timers that limit the length of exposure.
- A lead apron which is draped over your chest and lap.