

Dental Assistant

Work chairside next to a dentist, often after less than a year of training.

TYPICAL PAY

\$48,070

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$37k to \$62k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

up to 2 years

after high school

DEMAND

Very high

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

General dental offices, orthodontic and oral surgery practices, comm...

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma** Grade 12
Biology and chemistry help. Good hands and a steady stomach help more.
- 2 Training, or a job that trains you** 0 to 12 months
A certificate program accredited by the Commission on Dental Accreditation, or on-the-job training where the state allows it.
- 3 Radiography permit** Weeks
Most states require a course and an exam before you may take dental X-rays. This is usually the first thing an office pays for.
- 4 Certification** After training or 3,500 hours of work
The Certified Dental Assistant exam from the Dental Assisting National Board. Three parts, taken together.
- 5 Expanded duties** 1 to 3 years in
State-specific permits that let you do more at the chair, and get paid more for it.

Pros and cons

- + You can be working in health care within a year, sometimes sooner
- + Daytime hours, no nights, no weekends, no holidays
- + Very low training cost compared to any other clinical job
- The pay ceiling is low and comes fast
- Hard on your back, neck and wrists from leaning over a chair
- Small offices mean your whole work life depends on one dentist

Optional boosts

Expanded functions permit. Orthodontic assisting. Oral surgery assisting. Coronal polishing and sealants.

Good to know

The certification exam is three exams

The Certified Dental Assistant credential is made of three separate tests taken together: general chairside assisting, radiation health and safety, and infection control. You need all three, and there are several...

Four handed dentistry is the actual technique

The reason the job exists is that a dentist working alone has to keep putting instruments down. With a trained assistant across the chair, the dentist never takes their eyes off the mouth. It is a real named m...

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Dental Assistants (31-9091.00)
Dental Assisting National Board: Certified Dental Assistant exam
Commission on Dental Accreditation
American Dental Association

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/dental-assistant>



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