

Dentist

Diagnose and treat teeth and gums, usually in a practice you end up owning yourself.

TYPICAL PAY

\$170,950

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$86k to \$320k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

8 to 10 years

after high school

DEMAND

Moderate

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

Private dental offices, group practices, community health cent...

How you get there

- 1 Bachelor's degree** 4 years
Any major, but finish the required biology, chemistry, organic chemistry and physics with high grades.
- 2 Dental Admission Test** Junior year of college
A national exam covering sciences, reading and perceptual ability. The perceptual section tests spatial reasoning, not memory.
- 3 Apply through the national service** A year before you start
Most schools use the application service run by the American Dental Education Association, which sends one application to many schools.
- 4 Dental school** 4 years
Four years for a DDS (doctor of dental surgery) or DMD (doctor of dental medicine). They are the same degree with different names.
- 5 Board exams and state license** Final year plus a few months
The Integrated National Board Dental Examination, a hands-on clinical exam, and registration with your state dental board.

Pros and cons

- + High income with no nights, weekends or hospital call
- + You own a business instead of answering to one
- + Immediate, visible results: people arrive in pain and leave without it
- Debt in the hundreds of thousands before you earn anything
- Physically punishing on the neck, back and eyes
- Many patients are frightened of you before you speak

Good to know

Two different letters, one identical degree

Some schools award a DDS (doctor of dental surgery) and others a DMD (doctor of dental medicine). The curriculum, the licensing exams and the legal scope of practice are the same. The split is a historical...

The admission test checks your hands, sort of

The Dental Admission Test has a perceptual ability section: folding paper in your head, judging angles, reading three dimensional shapes from flat drawings. No other health profession admission test does th...

Optional boosts

Orthodontics. Oral and maxillofacial surgery. Pediatric dentistry. Endodontics.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Dentists, General (29-1021.00)
American Dental Association
American Dental Education Association
Commission on Dental Accreditation

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/dentist>



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