



## **Advice for patients visiting the hygienist**

### **What is a hygienist?**

A hygienist works with a dentist to help patients care for their teeth. The role is a combination of a clinician, treating and preventing gum (periodontal) disease and decay (caries) and a communicator/educator, teaching and motivating patients to care for their own teeth and gums.

Hygienists are specially trained for this work, doing a course/degree at a school of dental hygiene accredited by a university and the General Dental Council.

### **What does a hygienist do?**

#### **Clinical Tasks**

The hygienist's prime role is to prevent and treat periodontal disease, whilst working to a treatment plan written by the dentist. Each patient needs to be monitored according to his/her periodontal disease pattern to ensure it remains stable. At this surgery, at the initial visit the hygienist will carry out a basic examination to assess your periodontal health status and use a fine instrument to measure and chart the depth of any 'pockets' around your teeth, not everyone may have them. She will then carry out a range of professional cleaning tasks specific to each patient's particular requirements. She may also apply particular medications and solutions to the mouth and gums to kill bacteria and prevent gum disease. Your hygienist will then develop with you a maintenance programme for your mouth to keep it as clean and healthy as possible.

For children, the hygienist can help by cleaning and polishing the teeth, as well as carrying out some specialist treatments, such as the application of fissure sealants, a plastic coating which prevent decay occurring. Or fluoride applications.

#### **Advice and Education**

The hygienist can advise you on a range of oral health procedures tailored for your needs, and demonstrate how to carry them out effectively. These include:

- flossing
- brushing
- interdental cleaning
- subgingival (below the gum) cleaning

He/She can also recommend the most suitable products to carry out these procedures. The hygienist is also qualified to advise and help with more general issues concerning oral health, such as dietary advice or help in giving up smoking. Often the hygienist is the first health professional spending time with patients discussing these issues.

