

Wisconsin Dentist Association: When was the last time you saw your dentist?

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WEST ALLIS, Wis. – The American Dental Association estimates that 100 million Americans fail to see a dentist each year, and local dentists say that number has likely increased since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. As we continue to navigate a world with COVID-19 and public places become busy once again, the Wisconsin Dental Association is urging Wisconsinites to be sure to make regular dental appointments part of their routine.

“We are seeing patients of all ages who have not been to the dentist since before the pandemic began in March 2020,” said Dr. Chris Johnson, a general dentist in Eau Claire and president-elect of the Wisconsin Dental Association. “People are going to back to the office, concerts, sporting events and more – it’s important that they also get back into the routine of visiting a dentist to help maintain good oral hygiene and prevent dental disease.”

“It’s recommended to see your dentist every six months, so those who have been putting off their dental checkups have potentially missed around four or more appointments in a row,” Johnson added. “When we think about preventative care, that is a very long time, and patients may now be at risk of oral health problems such as advancing bone loss, depending decay or cracks in teeth, among others.”

The Wisconsin Dental Association and its member dentists understand that you may have some reservations that are keeping you from seeing your dentist. We’ve answered some frequently asked questions that may help you conquer any fears and schedule that appointment:

- **I'm nervous to visit the dentist because of COVID-19 exposure risk - what sort of precautions are being taken at dental offices?** Remember that dental offices are healthcare settings, and dentistry has always been a leader when it comes to patient safety and infection control. Dentists, hygienists and other members of the dental team continue to wear masks, use gloves and other PPE and sanitize between patients, in addition to other COVID-19 precautions. Clinics also have new infection control equipment and protocols in place. If you have any concerns about the precautions at your dental office, don't hesitate to call the office and ask. Keeping you safe and healthy are your dentist's highest priorities.
- **I'm embarrassed to go to the dentist because it's been so long since my last visit.** This is a common feeling - even when there's not a pandemic. Rest assured, your dentist will not judge you if it's been a long time since your last dental visit. If anything, they'll be happy and relieved to see you, and you'll feel a lot better after your appointment knowing that you're taking care of your oral health.
- **What should I expect at my dental visit?** The dentist and/or hygienist will ask about your recent medical history, examine your mouth and decide whether or not you need x-rays. You'll likely receive a cleaning, and depending on your treatment plan, the hygienist may use a special dental instrument to check your gums for gum disease. Your dentist will evaluate your overall dental health and conduct an oral cancer screening by holding your tongue with gauze, checking it and your whole mouth, then feeling your jaw and neck.
- **My mouth feels fine - do I still need to see a dentist?** Yes, even if you don't have any symptoms, you can still have dental health problems that only a dentist can diagnose. Regular dental visits will also help prevent problems from developing. Continuing and preventative care is important in keeping your mouth healthy, and good oral health is an essential piece of your overall health.
- **How can I find a dentist near me?** The WDA has the [Find-a-Dentist tool](#) on WDA.org, which can help you search for WDA member dentists in your area. You can search by ZIP code, dentist name and specialty. You can also ask your family, friends or co-workers for recommendations, or your family physician or local pharmacist.
- **I've made my dental appointment, but it's still several weeks away - what can I do in the meantime to keep my mouth healthy?** Healthy

habits include brushing your teeth for two minutes twice a day and flossing daily. To help prevent cavities, make sure your toothpaste contains fluoride. You can also use a fluoridated mouth rinse. Limit your intake of sugary and acidic beverages and foods, and drink plenty of water, especially if it's fluoridated!

For more information about dental visits, finding a dentist and tips on your oral health, visit www.wda.org and www.mouthhealthy.org

About the Wisconsin Dental Association

The Wisconsin Dental Association, with 3,100 member dentists and a number of dental hygienists, is the leading voice for dentistry in Wisconsin. WDA members are committed to promoting professional excellence and quality oral health care. Established in 1870, the WDA is headquartered in West Allis and has a legislative office in Madison. The WDA is affiliated with the American Dental Association – the largest and oldest national dental association in the world. For more information, call 414-276-4520, visit WDA.org and find us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [LinkedIn](#).