

Dental X-Rays

What are they?

X-rays pass through your body and make an image on a special type of film or through an electronic detector. The image produced, the x-ray photograph, is called a radiograph.

Radiographs allow the dentist to see what is happening deep inside the tooth and its roots. They will show any decay or gum disease, bone loss and, in children, how the jaw is growing, too.

The films are usually placed in special holders to make sure they sit in the right place in relation to your teeth and jaws.

Dentists use these types of x-ray films or images:

- A 'bitewing' film is gripped between your teeth. The radiograph then shows the areas in between the teeth, but not the roots.
- A 'periapical' film is placed next to the tooth and the image shows the whole of the tooth and its root.
- There are also large radiographs, which show all of the jaw and teeth. These are called 'panoramic' images. The machine that takes them moves around your head, while you stand or sit still.

What happens?

Trained members of the dentist's team can take radiographs, as well as the dentist. Training makes sure that everyone who takes radiographs takes them safely and so that they are clear to read.

Radiographs require tiny amounts of radiation. If you are concerned about safety, it may be helpful to know that:

- The amount of radiation involved in taking a dental x-ray photograph is very low, two dental x-rays exposes you to a similar amount of radiation as a flight from London to Bucharest.
- Your dentist will only take radiographs if they are needed and takes courses to remain up-to-date.
- X-ray machines are checked regularly to make sure that they are only using the intended amount of radiation.
- You can still have dental radiographs when you are pregnant, your dentist may still ask you whether you are pregnant, or whether you might be, just to check in case you would rather not have an x-ray taken at that time.

When the radiograph is taken:

- You will need to keep very still for a few seconds to give a clear picture.
- The film is usually developed while you wait and then labelled.
- Sometimes it is useful for the dentist to compare a new picture with one taken some time ago, your dentist will keep old images in your file.

What are the benefits?

- Many forms of dental treatment rely on radiographs. Simply looking into your mouth cannot give the dentist as much information as looking below the surface with x-rays.
- Radiographs allow your dentist to check on the state of your previous dental work, as well as identify any new problems such as decay or bone loss.