

Scaling and Polishing

What is scaling?

Scaling is carried out by a dentist or hygienist to remove deposits from your teeth.

Plaque is a soft, sticky substance that builds up on your teeth. It is mostly made up of bacteria.

The bacteria in plaque feeds on sugar from food and drink, producing acids as a waste product. The acids attach to the teeth by dissolving the minerals in the tooth surface. If this happens too often, tooth decay results.

Tartar (also known as 'calculus'), formed by hardened plaque, helps plaque to gather and makes it harder to remove when you brush.

You can't remove tartar just by brushing your teeth, but a dentist or hygienist can remove it using special instruments— this is known as scaling.

What is polishing?

A dentist or hygienist can also polish your teeth. This removes stains from coffee, tea, cigarettes and red wine; and it makes it more difficult for plaque to stick to your teeth.

If you clean your teeth very thoroughly at home, your scale and polish treatment will take less time.

What happens?

Dentists and hygienists use two types of instrument for scaling:

- Hand scalers are metal scrapers that come in different sizes and shapes, to reach different parts of the teeth. This is why you will see the dentist or hygienist changing instruments quite often.
- Electric scalers use a tip that vibrates very fast in a stream of water. The water is removed from your mouth using a small suction device. A hand scaler is also used along with an electric scaler, to check whether the teeth are completely clean.

For polishing, your dentist will use a rotating brush or rubber polisher with a special toothpaste.

Scaling cleans above and below the gum line. If you have gum disease, your dentist may also carry out deeper scaling, around the roots of the teeth, this is called 'root planing'. Your dentist may give you a local anaesthetic for this.

Your dentist or dental hygienist will also tell you about the best way to clean your teeth and gums thoroughly at home.