

X-rays are very revealing.



See your
dentist
regularly.

Dental x-rays are a safe and important part of evaluating and monitoring your overall oral health.

Some people worry about the safety of dental x-rays. Others wonder why x-rays are necessary. The fact is x-rays, or radiographs as they are termed technically, reveal information vital to diagnosing dental disease and developing an appropriate plan to attain and maintain lifelong dental health. X-rays are quite literally a “window to your teeth”. They let your dentist see all kinds of things that would otherwise go unnoticed. Some of the things x-rays may reveal are:

- 1) Up to fifty percent more decay which is hidden between teeth or under old fillings
- 2) Bone infections, cysts or tumors
- 3) Extra teeth, congenitally missing teeth or impacted teeth
- 4) Abnormal roots that make extractions or root canals more difficult

Types of X-rays

There are two main types of x-rays: intraoral and extraoral. Or, more simply, inside and outside the mouth. Intraoral is when the x-ray film is placed inside the mouth to get a picture of specific teeth. Extraoral is when the film is outside the mouth and is usually for a larger or more “panoramic” view of the jaw. More sophisticated imaging techniques such as CT scans, bone scans and MRI are also sometimes used in dentistry.

Safety features

All x-ray machines produce what is called ionizing radiation — this is what makes the “picture”. Excessive radiation can be damaging, but in low amounts, such as during normal dental procedures, the effects of radiation are minimal.



Federal regulations

Radiation produced by dental x-ray machines is far below the maximum limits set by federal safety legislation. With current modern technology a patient would need to have hundreds or thousands of dental x-rays to exceed the limits. Using appropriate lead barriers for patients can further reduce the scatter exposure.

Patients concerned about excessive radiation should discuss this with their dentist. As a good rule of thumb: if an x-ray is needed, especially if it is an emergency and not elective, do it.

If you have any concerns about x-rays, talk to your dentist. We care about you and your teeth.