

# A DEBRIDEMENT IS NOT THE SAME AS A CLEANING.

THIS BROCHURE CAN HELP  
EXPLAIN THE DIFFERENCE

## What is a "debridement"?

A *debridement* is a procedure for removing thick or dense deposits on the teeth. It is required when tooth structures are so deeply covered with plaque and calculus that the dentist and staff cannot check for decay, infections or gum disease. A debridement is not the same as a regular cleaning. It is usually a preliminary or "first" treatment when a person has developed very heavy plaque and/or calculus.

## What are plaque and calculus?

*Plaque* is a soft, sticky substance that forms on teeth, regardless of what types of foods are eaten, which is composed of bacteria and bacterial by-products.

*Calculus* is also known as *tartar* and is a hard, mineralized deposit, somewhat like cement, that is formed from the plaque in the mouth and the minerals in a person's saliva.

## What causes heavy plaque and calculus?

I brush my teeth!

While most people try to brush their teeth and take care of their mouths, sometimes their efforts are not as effective as they might be. Brushing quickly, using a worn-out brush, using a too-stiff brush, or inappropriate technique might be to blame. Some medical conditions or medicines may also cause more plaque and calculus to develop. Whatever the reason, the good news is that a debridement can be the first step to getting you back to health. As part of your care, we also will be showing you how to brush in the most effective way, as well as use floss and other tools. This will help prevent dense plaque and calculus from developing in the future.

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WHAT IS A  
DEBRIDEMENT?  
CAN'T I JUST HAVE MY  
TEETH CLEANED?

## What is a "debridement?"

A "debridement" is a procedure for removing thick or dense deposits on the teeth. It is required when deposits of plaque and calculus are too heavy to allow for an adequate exam by a dentist.

## What are plaque and calculus?

**Plaque** is a soft, sticky substance that forms on teeth, regardless of what types of foods are eaten, which is composed of bacteria and bacterial by-products.

**Calculus** is also known as **tartar** and is a hard, mineralized deposit, somewhat like cement, that is formed from the plaque in the mouth and the minerals in a person's saliva.

**No dentist has ever told me that I needed a debridement before. Can't I just have my teeth cleaned?**

Throughout a person's life many different conditions may arise. It may be that a person will not have had high cholesterol or high blood pressure before, but at their most recent medical check-up these conditions are discovered. Oral problems are no different. Situations and circumstances change. While it may seem trivial to worry about heavy deposits on your teeth, it is now known that oral conditions may be implicated in several general health disorders. Recent studies are beginning to show a relationship between teeth and gum health, and certain heart conditions and other systemic diseases. Dentists and hygienists are required to provide patients with the best information and treatment they know. It is their job. It is not proper to perform treatment that is inadequate or not appropriate.

**Explain the difference between a **debridement** and a "regular cleaning".**

A **regular cleaning** is known as a **prophylaxis** in dental terms. It is defined as the **removal of plaque, calculus, and stains from the tooth structures**.

A **prophylaxis** is accomplished by using dental instruments that scrape away deposits from the teeth. An electric device, called an ultra-sonic or sonic scaler may also be used. This deposit

removal is performed on tooth structures that have not been affected by bone loss, periodontal disease, or infection; typically the crowns of the teeth. A regular cleaning is recommended for persons who **do not have dense deposits**.

A **debridement** is recommended for persons who **do have dense deposits** of plaque and calculus. It is described by the ADA as *removal of (heavy) plaque and calculus that interferes with the ability of the dentist to perform a comprehensive oral evaluation... (it is) a preliminary procedure that does not preclude (rule out) the need for additional procedures*. Simply put, a debridement is necessary when dense plaque and/or calculus are present. Dental instruments and electric devices may also be used, but the amount of time needed to complete the procedure, as well as the difficulty and extent of the procedure are different.

## Who will perform the debridement?

Your dental hygienist or dentist will perform the service.

## What happens after the debridement?

Typically your dentist will need you to make a future appointment for an examination. Remember that the debridement is necessary for both your health and the dentist's ability to do an accurate exam. After your debridement, depending on the condition of your teeth and gums, you may need to have a regular cleaning; or you may require root planing and scaling or other more extensive gum and bone treatments. If you have decayed teeth, procedures for them will also be needed.

## Will my insurance pay for a debridement?

Dental insurance isn't really insurance (a payment to cover the cost of a loss) at all. It is actually a money benefit, typically provided by an employer, to help their employees pay for routine dental treatment. The employer usually buys a plan based on what dental treatment is covered, and how much the premium costs the employer per month. Often the employee is also responsible for a part of the premium cost. Most plans are only designed to cover a portion of the total cost of a person's necessary treatment. For example, a dentist may recommend a crown (cap) for a tooth that has extensive decay, however the dental plan may only cover the cost of a filling. This does not mean that the patient does not need a crown, only that the benefit is limited to a filling.

Many insurance plans provide for **teeth cleaning** twice per year. While this is common, that type of payment arrangement actually has no relationship to what any patient might really need. Many patients need debridement procedures, cleanings, periodontal treatment, fillings, implants, or other types of care more frequently than most plans will cover.

Some insurance plans will pay a portion of the cost of a debridement. This may be before or after the contract deductible has been paid by the patient. Some plans will pay what they usually allow toward a regular cleaning, with the patient being responsible for the balance. **Very few plans cover the true fee of a debridement.** The good news is that with the help of dental benefits, the amount you have to pay is reduced!

Keep in mind that only after a debridement has been performed will the dentist be able to get an accurate picture of your total oral health. Further procedures to treat periodontal disease or other problems may be needed.

## If my insurance plan will not pay for a debridement, why should I have it done?

Your insurance plan can help you pay for treatment that you need, however it was never designed to pay for everything. Most plans typically pay a minimum, regardless of what you might need as an individual. It is a mistake to let benefits be your sole consideration when you make decisions about your dental condition. People who have lost their teeth often say that they would pay any amount of money to get them back. Your teeth, smile, attractiveness, ability to chew and enjoy food, and general sense of well being are dependent on your dental health. It is worth the extra time and expense to keep your teeth for a lifetime.