

Pursuing a Career as a Dentist

Profession Overview

Dentists diagnose and treat problems with a patient's teeth, gums, and related parts of the mouth. They provide advice and instruction on taking care of teeth/gums and on diet choices that affect oral health.

Typical Duties:

- ▶ Remove decay from teeth and fill cavities
- ▶ Repair cracked or fractured teeth, remove teeth, straighten teeth
- ▶ Place sealants or whitening agents on teeth
- ▶ Give anesthetics to keep patients from feeling pain during procedures
- ▶ Write prescriptions for antibiotics or other medications
- ▶ Examine x-rays of teeth, gums, the jaw, and nearby areas for problems
- ▶ Make models and measurements for dental appliances, such as dentures, to fit patients
- ▶ Teach patients about diet, flossing, use of fluoride, and other aspects of dental care

Dentists in private practice are very team-focused and often employ and supervise dental hygienists, dental assistants, dental laboratory technicians, and administrative assistants. Approximately 80% of all dentists practice general dentistry. General dentists treat all patients, adults and children, in many different treatment facilities and settings. Other dentists practice in one of twelve specialty areas such as Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons, Orthodontists, or Pediatric Dentists. Check out more information about this career [on the Explore Health Careers webpage](#).

Education Programs

There are 76 U.S. and 10 Canadian dental schools which accept student applications for Doctor of Dental Medicine (D.M.D.) or Doctor of Dental Surgery (D.D.S.) programs, which are equivalent degrees. Programs typically take 4 years to complete. [View a list of dental schools on the ADEA website](#).

Admission Requirements: Knowledge and Strategies

Work with your faculty advisor and/or a member of [Kenyon's Health Professions Advising Committee \(HPAC\)](#) to plan for prerequisite requirements. Start early and consult each institution's individual website for specific requirements. ADEA charges a small fee for access to the [Dental School Explorer](#), which is a tool that provides details about individual dental schools including prerequisites. Common course requirements include: general biology, general chemistry, organic chemistry, biochemistry, and physics. Some programs will require additional courses such as human anatomy, human physiology, and microbiology. Individual schools determine how many prerequisites must be completed prior to applying. Many will allow 1-2 uncompleted classes at the time of application.

Shadowing dentists is a recommendation from most dental schools and a requirement of some. Requirements range from 40-150 shadowing hours. Programs generally encourage applicants to shadow multiple dentists as preparation. Research experience is not required for successful candidates but does provide a more advanced application of the role of scientific inquiry in the health professions. Dental schools also find value in community service and active leadership in campus organizations.

In order to perform dental procedures, a dentist must be able to work with precision on an extremely small scale. Superior eye-hand coordination is critical to ensuring the safety of patients and the integrity of the profession. The DAT specifically tests this skill, and most dental school admissions staff will ask about the development of manual dexterity skills in interviews. Common ways to fine-tune motor skills: drawing, painting, sewing/crocheting, and practicing musical instruments that require extensive hand-eye coordination.

View a detailed timeline of preparing for the application process on [the American Dental Education Association's website](#) to adequately plan. When you submit an application, remember you will do so through a centralized application site: [ADEA Associated American Dental Schools Application Service](#). AADSAS typically opens in May of each year, with the submission period beginning in June. Supplemental applications and fees are also required by many programs. Applicants who are Texas residents wishing to apply to dental schools in Texas will use the [Texas Medical and Dental Schools Application Service \(TMDSAS\)](#). Deadline dates vary by school.

Standardized Test

In order to be accepted into dental school, most schools require you to take the [American Dental Association's Dental Admission Test \(DAT\)](#). Content tested includes: Natural sciences (biology, general chemistry, and organic chemistry), perceptual ability (two- and three-dimensional problem solving), reading comprehension (dental and basic sciences), and quantitative reasoning.

General Advising Information

- Strive for academic success: Many dental school matriculants have a cumulative GPA at or above a 3.6
- Build relationships: create a strong network of pre-health advisors, faculty, peers and dental professionals. Remember, such connections can open up opportunities for you and letters of recommendation will be required to apply. ADEA AADSAS allows you to submit up to four letters.
- Plan financially: The cost of attending individual programs varies widely. [ADEA GoDental.org's Money Matters](#) help prospective students further develop their financial plan for dental school.

Want more information?

Make an appointment with Sara Stasko in the CDO via [Handshake](#) or email stasko1@kenyon.edu. Connect with a faculty advisor on the [Health Professions Advising Committee \(HPAC\)](#).