



Cost of Dentistry

Contrary to some perceptions, the cost of dental care has remained relatively stable in the United States, especially compared with the price of medical care. The average amount spent annually per person for dental treatment is relatively small, even if restorative work, such as a filling, is necessary. Overall, dental care amounts to about 5% of annual healthcare expenditures in the United States.

Still, for some families, dental visits can create financial strain. More people have medical insurance than dental insurance. Even patients with dental insurance often find their dental plans require them to pay a significant share of treatment costs beyond standard preventive care. Some plans have not raised annual caps on dental expenses for many years.

Fortunately, there are ways for patients to save money. Prevention is the best option for limiting expenses and avoiding the need for more costly dental work later. In addition to good dental hygiene at home, regular exams and cleanings are vital to maintaining healthy teeth.

Patients also should be educated consumers. They should ask their dentist for a written treatment plan that includes options and prioritizes recommended care. If patients are uncertain about the treatment plan, they should consider seeking a second opinion. Financing options are also often available. And some employers offer “flexible spending” programs, allowing employees to divert a portion of income into a pre-tax account reserved for dental or medical treatment.

Many low-income, uninsured patients can receive care through Denti-Cal and the Healthy Families Program (California’s SCHIP). Complementing those efforts, the CDA Foundation, since its inception in 2001, has provided more than \$450,000 in grants to local agencies and programs to expand dental treatment for those in need. CDA also participates in the Donated Dental Services program, which provides a network of volunteer dentists who provide free dental care to low-income, elderly or special needs adults not covered by government programs.

Dentistry is a time-intensive process involving not only the dentist, but other highly trained staff as well as costly materials and equipment. Dentists also incur laboratory expenses and other fixed overhead charges that are unavoidable. Providing quality care can be expensive.

The best solution to extensive dental treatment is prevention. We are committed to educating California families about the benefits of preventive oral health care. Just as a balanced diet and exercise can benefit a person’s overall health, good oral health habits and regular checkups can prevent the need for significant dental treatment. In good economic times and bad, CDA remains a strong advocate for programs that provide care to vulnerable populations and public policies to improve the oral health of all Californians.