When you're looking for a new dentist, you're searching for more than someone to just clean your teeth. "Your dental health is such a vital part of your overall health, so it's important for every patient to have a dental home," says Dr. Cathy Taylor-Osborne, an ADA dentist and director of the Kansas Department of Health and Environment’s Bureau of Oral Health. "That means there is always someone looking out for the best interest of you and your family."

Having a dental home allows you to feel comfortable when you're dropping in for a regular visit and gives you a safe and trusted place to turn for a procedure or dental emergency. Here's how to find the best dental fit for you and your family.

Start with the Basics

Regular visits are key to a healthy smile, so start with the details that work best with your lifestyle and dental care needs. Some things to consider include:

- Is the office easy to get to from your home or job?
- Do they have convenient office hours?
- If you have dental benefits, is this dentist in your network?
- Doctor-patient communication is very important. Do you need translation or interpreter services?
- Is the dentist a member of the ADA?

Launch the Search

Now that you're looking for a dentist, you're probably noticing advertisements online, in the newspaper and even in your mailbox. Social media sites may also have patient reviews of dentists near you, but remember that every person's dental health needs and experiences are their own. Here are some great places to start looking for a dentist:

- The ADA’s Find-A-Dentist tool. Search by name and location and specialty.
- Your local dental society. They can give you a list of dentist’s names in your area.
- A trusted friend or relative. If your mother says she loves her dentist, check them out!

Once you've found a few good candidates, visit their websites and see if their offices are on social media to learn more about them.

Meet and Greet

To find the right dentist, don't be shy about calling or visiting the dentists on your list before deciding. "Schedule consultation time with the dentist to meet with the dentist and staff before making an appointment," Dr. Taylor-Osborne says. "Make a list of questions and bring your records so the dentist can take a look at your dental history if you want to ask something more specific." You'll also be able to see if the office is welcoming, comfortable and neat.

A few questions you might want to ask are:

- Will the dentist explain ways to help you prevent dental health problems?
- Is dental health instruction provided?
- How does the dentist and office staff handle emergencies outside of office hours?
- Is the office staff familiar with your benefit plan, and do they offer financial options for treatment costs?
- Will your medical and dental history be recorded and placed in a permanent file?

Dr. Taylor-Osborne encourages anyone looking for a dentist to share past dental experiences or dental concerns, including any anxiety. "Make sure the dentist understands your concerns and answers all your questions," she says.

Pick a Partner

Above all, you want to choose a dentist who can be a part of your total health care team. "So much of your dental health can impact your overall health," Dr. Taylor-Osborne says. "Look for someone who can be a coach to motivate you, a trusted advisor to turn to when health issues arise and a partner to make dental care decisions with."
Exploring dental crowns

Crowns were once widely referred to as “caps.” A crown is a permanent cover for a tooth that would otherwise require a very large filling after dental decay has been removed. Crowns also may be used to repair cracked or broken teeth and to hold a tooth in place.

Many people visit their dentists and learn they have a tooth that requires a crown. In many instances, dental crowns are necessary for proper tooth care.

Sometimes crowns are used for cosmetic modifications or to hold a tooth in place.

The crown itself can be made from different materials, like stainless steel, gold or metallic alloy, porcelain, porcelain fused to metal, and resin. A dentist will determine which material will work best depending on the application and tooth location.

Understanding your appointment(s)

Crowns are typically installed in two appointments. The first appointment requires prep work so the tooth can hold the crown. This is typically a painless procedure, and one in which the dentist will anesthetize the tooth and gum tissue and then file down the tooth along the chewing surface and sides to make room for the crown covering. If the tooth was decayed or insubstantial, the dentist may have to “build up” the tooth instead of filing it down. Again, these procedures are made by the dentist who has the expertise to gauge how much workable tooth is left.

Once the tooth has been prepared, an impression will be made of the bite area. That’s because the permanent crown will be fabricated in a laboratory and the final color will need to be exact for comfort — and also to ensure that bacteria and food debris do not get caught between the crown and tooth. The final component is a temporary cap that will keep the prepared tooth clean. This is molded in the office and will be worn only until the custom-made crown is ready. When the permanent crown is delivered, the patient will return to the office to have it checked for fit and then cemented into place.

Full and partial crowns

A partial crown may be used if only a portion of the tooth needs to be covered. Dentists will often rely on full crowns to get maximum coverage and strength.

Cost factor

Crowns can be expensive. According to the resource CostHelper, crowns can range from $500 to $3,000 depending on the material used and the patient’s insurance coverage.

Dental insurance may cover a portion of the cost when the crown is medically necessary, but insurance may not cover anything if the procedure is only cosmetic.

It’s always a good idea for patients to talk to their dentist and ask questions about crowns prior to starting the procedure. Dental crowns can last several years and represent the best way to salvage a tooth that is cracked or damaged.

How to encourage kids to take care of their teeth

Parents of young children know that getting kids to brush their teeth can sometimes feel like pulling teeth. Kids have a long history of disliking dental care, which can frustrate parents and take the importance and long-lasting benefits of proper dental hygiene. While many children may never actually run to the bathroom to brush their teeth, parents carry various approaches to get kids to embrace proper dental care.

• Start early. Parents should not hesitate to become cleaning kids’ teeth once the first tooth appears. The mother or dental care is part of a child’s routine, the more likely he or she is to accept it as part of everyday life. The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry recommends using a soft-bristled brush with a small head, likely, to use a toothbrush designed for infants, brushing teeth once per day in bedtime. The AAPD advises taking kids to visit a pediatric dentist when the first tooth appears, or no later than the child’s first birthday.

• Make it a group effort. Young children love to imitate their parents’ actions and behaviors, and moms and dads can use this imitation to their advantage when trying to get kids to brush their teeth. Brush teeth together as a family, making it seem like an enjoyable twice-daily activity. Get down on kids’ level and show them how to brush. If kids are resistant, engage them in conversation while brushing so they don’t even realize they’re being cleaned away.

• Involve kids in choosing their dental care products. While parents should be mindful of the type of toothbrush their children use, there is no rush to purchase something recommended by the child’s pediatric dentist. Let young children choose their toothbrush and toothpaste. Kids might prefer a particular flavor of toothpaste, and a colorful toothbrush with a favorite film or television character might make kids more enthusiastic and less fussy about brushing.

• Compliment kids after positive dental appointments. When pediatric dentists aim to make their patients love to brush and express their pride in them for taking dental hygiene as seriously as they do.

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Braces have evolved considerably over the years. With new technology available, plus an acknowledgment that braces are a necessity for people of various ages and not just children, patients of all ages are choosing orthodontic procedures to give themselves healthy smiles.

Early braces
Orthodontic treatment in some shape or form has been around since 1000 BC. Studies of exhumed Egyptian mummies found that some Egyptians were buried with crude metal bands around their teeth, and archaeologists believe a material may have been tied to these bands to provide pressure to move the teeth. Ancient Romans and Greeks wrote about bringing newly emerging teeth into proper position by pushing them with fingers. Pierre Fauchaud is considered the father of dentistry and a pioneer in the field of orthodontics. Fauchaud invented the bandeau, which was a horseshoe-shaped strip of metal with regularly spaced holes to fit around teeth and correct their alignment, states Colgate Oral Care Center. Nowadays, braces have evolved even further, with millions of people choosing from the various types of braces to correct dental problems. The American Association of Orthodontists notes that one out of five orthodontic patients is over the age of 21 — proving it’s never too late to straighten one’s teeth.

Why braces? Braces work by applying pressure to the teeth gradually shift them and the jaw. Traditional braces consist of small brackets adhered to the teeth that are connected by a wire. Ancient Romans and Greeks wrote about bringing newly emerging teeth into proper position by pushing them with fingers. Pressure is achieved by periodically tightening the wire. Orthodontists also evaluate the inside of the mouth for signs of disease or irritation.

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Is Sparkling Water Bad for My Teeth?
Sparkling water is far better for your teeth than sugary drinks. In addition, it is sure to drink plenty of regular, fluoridated water. This is the best beverage for your teeth. Water with fluoride naturally helps fight cavities, washes away the leftover fluid cavity-causing bacteria from and keeps your mouth from becoming dry (which can put you at risk for tooth decay). Proper dental care and oral hygiene is essential at all stages in life, even for people who have dentures, partials or implants. People must recognize that oral hygiene protects their dentures as well as their mouths.

According to the American College of Prosthodontists, 35 million Americans do not have any teeth while 11 percent of the population requires the use of a complete denture. In addition, 5 percent of the U.S. population wears a partial denture. The Canadian Denture & Implant Centres says that 16 percent of the population wear dentures.

Removable dentures require care to keep them clean and in good repair. Servicing dentists also help ensure wearers’ mouths stay healthy. Follow these guidelines to keep dentures clean.

• Handle with care. Dentures are strong, but they are not impervious to damage. Treat them with care while handling, being sure not to bend or damage any clasps when cleaning, and try not to drop the dentures. When handling dentures, Colgate recommends standing over a folded towel or basin of water for added protection.

• Brush daily. False teeth need to be brushed, so make it a part of your toothbrush routine and yet. Brushing will help remove food deposits and prevent staining.

• Take a break. When removing dentures before going to bed and soak the dentures in warm water or special denture cleansers. Removing dentures for six to eight hours allows tissue inside the mouth to recover. Soaking helps to remove stains, bacteria and tartar. The Mayo Clinic notes that most dentures need to be tightened as frequently. Soaking also will inspect the inside of the mouth for signs of disease or irritation.

• Clean your mouth. While dentures are removed, use gaze or a soft toothbrush to clean the tongue, palate and cheeks. If you still have any natural teeth, use a soft-bristled brush to cleanse. Always rinse dentures before returning them to your mouth.

• Schedule regular dental visits. Dentists can advise how frequently to have dentures checked for fit and professional cleaning. Loose dentures can cause pain and irritation, so it’s best to address any issues regarding fitting promptly. Dentists also will inspect the inside of the mouth for signs of disease or irritation.

• Eat healthy foods. Make sure to eat a well-balanced diet to keep the body and mouth healthy. Cut up hard foods like fresh fruits and vegetables if dentures are impacting your ability to eat these foods. People of all ages rely on partial or complete dentures to maintain their smile. Routine care is necessary to keep the dentures intact and mouths healthy.

Orthodontic braces have evolved over a folded towel or basin of water for added protection.

Caring for dentures improves oral health
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Be mindful of what’s in your sparkling water. Citrus-flavored waters often have higher acid levels that does increase the risk of damage to your enamel. Plan to enjoy these in one sitting or with meals. The result? The higher acid level, some reports have questioned whether sipping sparkling water is putting you at risk for tooth decay? Because any drink with carbon-kling or not—plain water is always the best choice.

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