

# Smilematters

## PATIENT FACT SHEET

### Picture This: The Scoop on Dental X-Rays

In most cases, you only get X-rays when something hurts — like when you’ve sprained or broken something. So why do we take X-rays when there doesn’t seem to be anything wrong?

Basically, its because there are things that can go wrong in your mouth in spaces we just can’t see. We use X-rays to get a detailed picture of the condition of your teeth, jaw, facial bones and the roots of your teeth.

X-rays allow us to find and treat problems before they become serious, which ultimately saves you time, money and unnecessary discomfort. Some of the conditions that we can see with the help of X-rays are:

- small cavities between the teeth;
- gum disease;
- impacted teeth;
- infections in the bone;
- abscesses;
- developmental abnormalities;
- certain growth, such as tumors and cysts.

A personalized X-ray schedule is set up for you based on your overall health and your individual needs. Your age, risk for disease and signs and symptoms are all taken into account.

In our office you will likely have either a “periapical” or “bitewing” X-ray taken. Bitewing X-rays show the presence of decay in between the teeth, while periapical X-rays show tooth structure, bone levels, cysts and abscesses.

The other type of X-ray we use is called a “panoramic radiograph,” which allows us to see your entire mouth, including upper and lower teeth and your jaw.

So, the panoramic X-ray shows us a general view of your entire mouth, while the periapical or

bitewing X-rays show a very detailed image of a small area.

As you probably know, dental X-rays involve a very low dose of radiation. When human tissue is exposed to X-rays, some of the energy is absorbed and some passes through without effect. The amount of energy absorbed by the tissue is the dose, which is measured in rads, or rems. The exposure and dose are so small that they are expressed in “milli” units — or units that are equal to 1/1,000 of a rad, or rem.

To put all of this into perspective a full mouth X-ray exam of 21 films will deliver an effective dose of about 13 millirems. This is equivalent to about 16 days of expose to naturally occurring environmental radiation. It is estimated that we receive about 300 millirems of radiation every year from the natural environment.

You can rest assured that in our office we minimize the amount of radiation you receive by:

- taking only necessary X-rays;
- using the latest techniques and equipment;
- using the fastest type of X-ray film;
- using equipment that restricts the beam to the area that needs to be examined;
- using a lead apron and thyroid shield when appropriate.

Our goal is for you to feel comfortable in our dental office while we provide you with the quality dental care you’ve come to know. The doctor-patient relationship we’ve developed is important to us and we encourage you to ask questions so that you are comfortable with procedures in our dental office.