

AGD:FACTSHEET FOR THE PATIENT

Compiled for you by the Academy of General Dentistry



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AIR ABRASION

What is air abrasion?

Air abrasion is a way to remove decay from a tooth without using a dental drill. It works like a sandblaster removing graffiti from walls. The air abrasion hand-piece blows a powerful air stream of tiny aluminum oxide particles out of its tip onto the tooth. The tiny particles bounce off the tooth and blast the decay away.

Air abrasion is most commonly used to prepare teeth for composites, or "white fillings." Air abrasion also helps to repair cracks and discolored teeth, to prepare teeth for bonding procedures, such as sealants, and for various other procedures. Air abrasion works well to repair chipped, fractured, or worn teeth; to prepare teeth for cosmetic surgery; remove stains and spots; repair old fillings and sealants; and repair broken crowns and bridges.

What happens during air abrasion?

Your dentist might ask you to wear protective glasses during the procedure, and a rubber dam might be placed inside your mouth and around the tooth area being treated. Air abrasion procedures may leave some dusty particles in your mouth that make your mouth feel gritty. The particles are harmless and can be rinsed out easily. To reduce dust buildup, the dentist might use a vacuum hose or water spray during the procedure.

What are the advantages of air abrasion?

Because air abrasion procedures are virtually painless, anesthetic injections are generally unnecessary. Also, no vibrations or heat from friction are produced by air abrasion systems, which are quiet and will not harm soft mouth tissue. Because air abrasion dissolves tooth structure

very precisely, the process removes less of your tooth than a drill does; in addition, the risk for breaking the enamel is reduced. During teeth cleanings, a dentist sometimes can spot a shallow cavity and fill it the same day using air abrasion techniques, restoring your tooth with natural-looking materials that strengthen and protect it. Additionally, treatment time is usually shorter than with procedures involving a drill.

Are there any disadvantages?

Air abrasion is not always totally painless. The air and the abrasives used can cause sensitivity in some teeth. It is well-suited for removing small cavities that form on the surface of teeth, but is not recommended for deep cavities (those close to your tooth's pulp). Only composite filling materials can be used following air abrasion because these materials adhere well to the smooth surface created by the process. For silver fillings, a dentist must use a drill to prepare your tooth in order to prevent the filling from falling out.

Is air abrasion for everyone?

Yes. Air abrasion is an especially good option for children or anyone who may be afraid of the needle, noise, and vibration of a regular dental drill. However, there are some treatments—such as crowns, inlays, onlays, and bridges—which still require a dental drill. Air abrasion is not an alternative for every procedure.

Will my insurance plan cover air abrasion?

Dental insurance plans change often, so some may cover air abrasion and some may not. It is best to check your plan to see if it covers air abrasion procedures.

RESOURCES

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