

# Dental Radiographs (X-Rays)

Small amounts of radiation are used to make pictures of teeth (radiographs). These black and white images show various shades of gray because some portions of teeth or dental restorations let more or less of the radiation pass through. The result is a picture that shows the presence of dental decay. It is nearly impossible to diagnose the presence of decay between the teeth without using dental radiographs. By using radiographs, small areas of decay can be identified before the decay process endangers the life of the tooth.

There are two types of dental radiographs, conventional and digital. The newer form of radiographs are digital, which allow faster observation of the images with lower radiation.

Some people are worried about the radiation used in dentistry. Dental radiographs use a very small amount of radiation and it is directed exactly to the site where it is needed. The amount of radiation required for one dental radiograph (bitewing or periapical) is about the same amount of radiation you receive by standing in a parking lot in the sun for a few minutes, or riding in an airliner for a few minutes. The fear of dental radiographs, which are used with caution and good judgment, is totally unfounded. The extremely minimal amount of radiation present in dental radiographs is far outweighed by the diagnostic advantage provided by the radiographs.