



Nervous about X-Rays..

Information for the patient

R.S.Hendry DDS BSc
www.drhendry.ca

**Anxiety about x-rays is understandable. Information is usually the answer.
Here are our answers to the most common concerns:**

I don't like radiation.

Unfortunately being alive on the earth means constant exposure to ionizing radiation - it's in ultraviolet sunlight, in the air, given off by building materials, and in cosmic rays from space. What matters is the dose. Just standing around, you receive approximately three dental x-rays' worth of radiation every day. The extremely low dose is what makes dental x-rays very safe. Low doses spread over a period of time are also known to be safer than high doses at once, because the body has time to recover.

Nothing's bothering me

That's great, and we want to keep it that way. Most people who have strokes, high blood pressure, cancer, or dental disease feel nothing until it's too late. We need to find it early.

I don't want to take any chances.

That's also not really an option for any of us. The reason x-rays are used at all is that their extremely low risks are vastly outweighed by the risks of unseen disease and problems. In dentistry, most of the conditions diagnosed by x-rays are otherwise undetectable. These include decay, bone disease, early abscesses, periodontal (gum) disease, cysts, fractures, impacted or missing teeth, orthodontic problems, and tumours.

I don't like to have any unnecessary x-rays.

Dentists and radiologists have been trained for many years to follow the principle known as ALARA: "As Low As Reasonably Achievable". This Prime Directive of radiology means that we take the minimal number of x-rays films to diagnose and treat the patient safely. This is standard operating procedure - we never suggest or take unnecessary x-rays

I just had a lot of medical x-rays.

Dental x-rays are generally insignificant in comparison to medical x-rays, because of their small size and limited portion of the body exposed. Here's a brief comparison (doses in millirems):

Barium enema lower GI series	875	Gallbladder	168
Barium meal: upper GI series	595	Skull	78
Mammography	1000	Femur (upper leg)	21
IV pyelogram	420	Dental (Panoramic)	1
Ribs	143	Dental	1/2

It would take 1750 dental x-rays to equal the radiation of a lower GI series.

I don't care; I just want to take my chances without x-rays.

That's your choice, of course. But it does raise ethical and legal problems for our office. All dentists are required to uphold a professionally reasonable standard of diagnosis and care, and this requires some use of x-rays. Failing to live up to these professional standards can constitute malpractice. We can be flexible to a point, but if you want to have ongoing care without adequate x-rays, Dr. Hendry can't be your dentist.

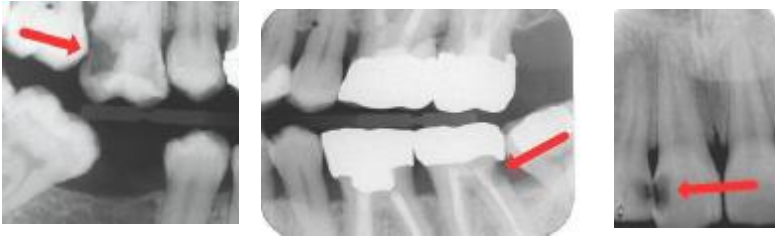
Can't I just sign a waiver that I don't want x-rays?

No - for the same reason that you can't sign a waiver absolving your doctor of responsibility for not listening to your heart, (or your restaurant for giving you food poisoning from unsanitary conditions). We're not allowed to do negligent dentistry - even if the patient asks for it. (And as a good and conscientious dentist, I don't want to.) The only option for a patient who insists on treatment with no x-rays is to try to find a dentist who is willing to take the risks with you - and good dentists won't.

It's the patient's choice, of course, but we hope this helps. If you're comfortable driving your car here and walking outside in the sunlight, there's really no reason to be afraid of the occasional dental x-ray.

X-Rays Show Hidden Problems

These examples aren't from a text book - they are all from our practice.
All of these problems are common and painless.

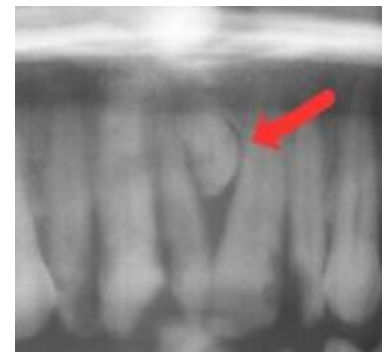


Decay under crowns, under fillings, and inside teeth is invisible and painless until a toothache or abscess results. The longer they remain undiscovered, the larger they get and the more serious and expensive the result.

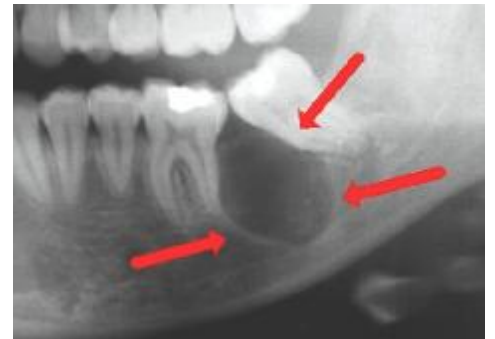


Impacted third molars (wisdom teeth) are best discovered early, before they develop roots or damage the bone or adjacent teeth

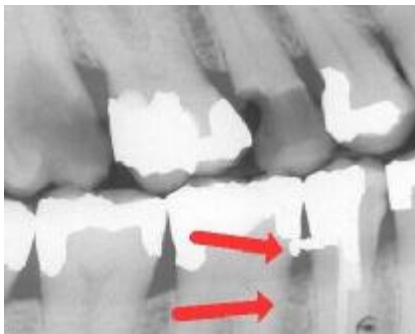
Impacted extra teeth often turn up on radiographs, and can damage adjacent teeth and bone if left untreated



Cysts in the bone are painless, and can grow undetected until they damage or destroy teeth and bone, or erupt into abscesses.



This large cyst would have destroyed the patient's jaw. It was discovered by accident - on an x-ray.



A ragged edge on an old filling can accumulate extra plaque and calculus (tartar), and become a focus for periodontal disease. Note the loss of bone below it.

A broken root is embedded in the jaw from a previous extraction. This one is behaving, and only needs to be monitored occasionally.

