

How to Transfer Your Dental Records When You Switch Clinics

By JoD Patient Guide · 6 min read

When you move to a new dental office, your teeth come with you but your file does not, at least not automatically. The X-rays, charting, and treatment notes that trace your dental history stay with your previous office until you arrange for them to move. The good news is that transferring records is a routine, well-established process, and in Ontario you have clear rights around your own health information.

Here is how to transfer dental records smoothly, what to expect, and a few things worth knowing before you ask.

Your records belong to your care, even if the office holds the file

There is a useful distinction to understand. The physical or digital file, including the X-ray images themselves, is generally kept and maintained by the dental office that created it. But the personal health information within it is yours in a meaningful sense: under Ontario's Personal Health Information Protection Act, known as PHIPA, you have the right to access your information and to have copies provided or sent elsewhere.

In practice, that means you can ask your former office to release a copy of your records to your new one, and they are expected to cooperate within a reasonable time. You are not asking a favour; you are exercising a right.

The simplest way to start

You have two common routes, and most people use the first:

- **Ask your new office to request the records.** New offices do this all the time. You sign an authorization, and they contact your previous office on your behalf. It is the least effort for you.
- **Request the records yourself.** You contact your former office directly and ask them to send your file to the new one, or to you.

If you are still choosing a new office, it is worth asking at the outset whether they will handle the request for you. A quick way to settle that is to [contact a dental office](#) and ask how they prefer to

receive transferred records and what they need from you to begin.

The record release form

Because the information is sensitive, offices will usually ask you to complete a written authorization, sometimes called a record release or consent form. This protects you by confirming that the request genuinely comes from you. The form typically asks for:

- Your full name, date of birth, and contact details.
- The name of the office releasing the records and the office receiving them.
- What you want sent (for example, the full file, or just recent X-rays).
- Your signature and the date.

Submitting this in writing, rather than by a quick phone call, tends to speed things up because it gives the releasing office everything they need in one go.

What you can ask them to send

You can request your whole file or a specific part of it. For most moves, the genuinely useful items are:

- Recent X-rays, which spare you from repeating imaging.
- Your dental chart and treatment history.
- Notes on any ongoing or planned treatment.

Asking for your X-rays specifically is worth doing, since recent radiographs give a new dentist a head start and reduce unnecessary repeat imaging. Images are usually sent digitally these days, which makes the transfer quick once the paperwork is in order.

Fees and timing

An office may charge a reasonable fee for copying and sending records; this is permitted and is separate from any care you receive. If a fee applies, they should be able to tell you roughly what it will be. Timing varies with how busy the office is, but records are expected to be provided within a reasonable period. If you have a treatment appointment coming up, start the request early so the file arrives before you sit down.

What is actually in a dental record

It helps to know what you are asking to move. A typical dental file is more than a list of appointments. It usually includes your charting, which maps every tooth and the work done on each; your radiographs; periodontal measurements that track gum health over time; and clinical notes describing findings and conversations. For a new dentist, the periodontal history and older X-rays are often the most valuable pieces, because they show change over time rather than a single snapshot.

That is why transferring records is worth the small effort even when you feel healthy. A new office can examine you from scratch, but it cannot see how a particular tooth or gum pocket has behaved over the past several years without the earlier information. The transfer turns a first visit from a cold start into a continuation.

A common scenario

Say you are registering with a new office after moving across the city. You complete the new patient forms, and partway through you reach a question about recent X-rays. Rather than booking a fresh full set, you sign the office's release authorization, and they email your former clinic to request your digital radiographs and charting. A few days later the file arrives, your new dentist reviews it before your examination, and you avoid repeat imaging you did not need. The whole thing cost you one signature and a short wait.

A few practical tips

- Make the request in writing and keep a copy for yourself.
- Be specific about what you want and where it should go.
- If you are moving across provinces, mention it, as the receiving office may have a preferred format.
- If an old office has closed, records are usually transferred to another custodian or stored for a required period; the provincial regulator can point you in the right direction.

Frequently asked questions

How do I get my X-rays from a previous dentist?

Ask your former office to send a copy of your recent X-rays to your new office or to you, usually by completing a short written authorization. Most imaging is digital, so once the release form is in, the transfer is quick. You can also ask your new office to make the request on your behalf, which many are happy to do.

Can a dental office refuse to transfer my records?

Under Ontario's PHIPA, you have the right to access your personal health information and to have it transferred, and offices are expected to comply within a reasonable time. A reasonable copying fee may apply, and there are narrow legal exceptions, but an outstanding account alone is generally not a reason to withhold records. If you run into difficulty, the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario can advise.

Do I keep the original records or just copies?

The office that created your file generally keeps the original for its own required retention period, and you receive copies. For a transfer, copies are exactly what the new office needs, so this does not affect your ongoing care in any way.

Sources & further reading

- [Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario — Accessing Your Health Records](#) — your rights under PHIPA to access and transfer health information.
- [Royal College of Dental Surgeons of Ontario — Information for Patients](#) — standards Ontario dentists follow, including record-keeping.
- [Government of Ontario — Personal Health Information Protection Act, 2004](#) — the legislation governing health records in Ontario.