

Questions Worth Asking During a Dental Consultation

By JoD Patient Guide · 7 min read

A dental consultation is one of the few appointments where the main job is talking, not treatment. Someone explains what they have found, lays out a plan, and asks whether you would like to proceed. It is easy to nod along, agree, and only think of your real questions on the drive home. The better approach is to arrive with a short list and treat the conversation as the decision-making moment it actually is.

Good questions do more than satisfy curiosity. They give you the information you need to consent properly, to compare options, and to understand what you are signing up for before anyone books a chair.

Start with the diagnosis itself

Before discussing what to do, make sure you understand what has been found. Reasonable questions include:

- What exactly is the problem, and how was it identified?
- Is this causing issues now, or is it something you are flagging for the future?
- What happens if I do nothing, or wait and watch?

That last question is often the most clarifying. Some conditions need prompt attention; others can be monitored. Knowing which category you are in helps you weigh urgency against everything else in your life and budget.

Ask about alternatives, not just the recommendation

Most dental problems have more than one reasonable path. A dentist will usually suggest the option they consider most suitable for you, but it helps to hear the full menu:

- What are the alternatives to what you are recommending?
- What are the advantages and trade-offs of each?
- Why do you favour this option for my situation specifically?

Understanding the alternatives is part of informed consent, which is a patient's right rather than a courtesy. A dentist should be comfortable walking you through the choices and the reasoning, including the option of doing less.

Understand the plan and the timeline

If treatment involves several steps, ask how they fit together. How many visits? Over what period? Is there a particular order, and does one stage need to heal before the next begins? Knowing the shape of the plan helps you arrange time off work, childcare, or travel, and it prevents the surprise of discovering a three-month process when you expected one afternoon.

Talk about cost before you commit

Money is a fair thing to raise, and a good office expects it. Ask for a written estimate that lists the procedures and their codes so you can see what each part costs. If you have insurance, ask whether the office can submit a pre-treatment estimate to your insurer, which shows what might be covered before you proceed.

Prices and coverage vary, so avoid assuming a figure quoted elsewhere applies here. The point is to leave with clarity, not a vague sense of expense. When you are ready to move forward, you can [book a consultation](#) with an office such as MiNa Family Dentistry to go through the specifics for your own case.

Clarify the risks and the recovery

Every procedure carries some consideration, and you are entitled to hear them plainly. Useful questions:

- What are the common risks or side effects, and how likely are they?
- What is recovery usually like, and how long before I feel normal?
- Are there things I should or should not do afterward?
- What should I watch for, and who do I call if something seems wrong?

Answers here will be general, because outcomes depend on the individual. A careful dentist will say so, and will frame risks in terms of what tends to happen rather than promises about what will.

Ask who is doing the work

For more involved treatment, it is reasonable to ask who will carry it out, what their training is, and whether any part will be referred to a specialist. This is not about doubting anyone; it is about understanding the team and how a complex case is handled. If a referral is part of the plan, ask how the hand-off works and whether records travel with you.

A short list you can bring

Topic	A question to ask
Diagnosis	What is the problem, and what happens if I wait?
Options	What are the alternatives, and why this one for me?
Plan	How many visits, and over what timeframe?
Cost	Can I have a written estimate and a pre-treatment estimate for my insurer?
Risks	What are the common risks, and what is recovery like?
Team	Who performs the treatment, and is a specialist involved?

It is fine to take time to decide

Unless a situation is urgent, you do not have to commit in the room. Taking your estimate home, checking your coverage, and sleeping on a significant decision is normal and reasonable. A dentist who respects informed consent will give you space to do that, and many patients find the plan makes more sense once the pressure of the moment has passed.

Two small habits make the conversation stick. Write the answers down as you go, or ask whether you can record the explanation on your phone, since it is hard to retain detail while also processing a diagnosis. And if the treatment is significant, consider bringing someone with you. A second set of ears catches things you miss and gives you someone to think it through with afterward. Neither request is unusual, and most dentists welcome a patient who wants to understand properly rather than agree quickly.

Frequently asked questions

What should I ask before agreeing to dental treatment?

Cover five areas: what the problem is and what happens if you wait, what the alternatives are, how the plan and timeline work, what it will cost in writing, and what the risks and recovery look like.

If more involved treatment is proposed, also ask who will perform it. Those questions give you the information needed to consent with confidence.

Is it reasonable to ask for a written estimate?

Yes. A written estimate that lists the procedures and their codes is a normal request, and it lets you understand the cost and, if you have insurance, submit it for a pre-treatment estimate. Having it on paper also makes it easier to compare options or seek a second opinion if you choose to.

Sources & further reading

- [Royal College of Dental Surgeons of Ontario — Information for Patients](#) — patient rights, consent, and what to expect from a dentist in Ontario.
- [Canadian Dental Association — Your Oral Health](#) — general patient guidance on dental care and decisions.
- [Ontario Dental Association — Your Oral Health](#) — Ontario patient information, including fees and the dental visit.