

Dental care while traveling

Planning a trip out of the country? Make an appointment for a dental checkup before you leave. A checkup is especially important if you'll be traveling in developing countries or remote areas without access to good dental care.

If you are thinking about taking a "dental" vacation outside the United States in an attempt to save money, here are some things to consider. Dentists practicing in the United States attend an accredited dental school for four years. They pass national and state dental board examinations before they receive a license to practice. Dentists in the United States also are held to a high standard of care. For example, they must follow infection control guidelines to prevent bloodborne illnesses from spreading.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

How will you determine the qualifications and experience of the dentist who will be treating you in a foreign country? How is payment processed? If you have dental insurance, will the provider cover treatment that is performed outside the United States and to what extent?

What happens if something goes wrong during or after treatment? Is there a complaint process or a method for getting a refund if you are not satisfied, such as peer review? If you can't get a refund, is there a meaningful recourse for dental treatment that is unsatisfactory or harmful? Will you have a right to sue? If so, can you do so cost-effectively? Will you need to retain a foreign lawyer or return to the country where you received care to testify or appear at trial? Will you get a fair trial? All of these are important considerations before seeking care in other countries.

BE PREPARED

A checklist for safe dental treatment abroad can be found in "Traveler's Guide to Safe Dental Care," available from the Organization for Safety and Asepsis Procedures. You'll find it at "www.osap.org".

The International Association for Medical Assistance to Travellers (IAMAT) maintains a network of medical personnel, hospitals and clinics around the world that have agreed to treat IAMAT members in need of care. IAMAT is helpful in referring patients to dentists, and any traveler can belong to IAMAT. There is no membership fee, although a donation is welcome. For more information, visit "www.iamat.org" or contact IAMAT, 1623 Military Road, No. 279, Niagara Falls, N.Y. 14304-1745, 1-716-754-4883, "info@iamat.org".

You can find good dental care in many parts of the world. For example, in most European countries, the standard of dental education is highly comparable with that in the United States, and excellent dentists abound. However, you also may contact the American Dental Society of Europe (ADSE). The Society's members—dentists who live and work in Europe—have completed a full-time course of study at a recognized dental school in the United States or Canada. For more information, visit "www.adse.co.uk" or contact ADSE, Dr. Alastair MacDonald, 62 Highburgh Road, Glasgow G12 9EJ Scotland, 011 44 141 331 0088 (office telephone), 011 44 141 338 8109 (fax).

Many countries have dental associations that can provide referrals. For a list of international dental associations, visit "www.ada.org". The international directories can be found at "www.ada.org/ada/organizations/international.asp".

Dental referrals also may be available from the hotel concierge, the American Consulate (see U.S. Department of State Web site at "http://travel.state.gov/index.html") or the American Embassy in the country you are visiting. The best insurance, however, is to have your teeth in tiptop shape before you depart. ■

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"For the Dental Patient" provides general information on dental treatments to dental patients. It is designed to prompt discussion between dentist and patient about treatment options and does not substitute for the dentist's professional assessment based on the individual patient's needs and desires.