

Dental Laboratory Technician

■ Job Description

The dental laboratory technician makes and repairs fixed and removable prostheses (e.g., dentures, partial dentures, orthodontic appliances, crowns and bridges in porcelain, and full cast metals). The work requires the use of delicate tools, good vision and manual dexterity, and the ability to follow directions precisely.

■ Job Settings

Most dental lab technicians work in dental laboratories. Most of these labs are small, privately owned businesses with fewer than five employees.

■ Projected Need

Nationally, the number of jobs for dental laboratory technicians is expected to grow more slowly than average through 2010. In Illinois, little or no growth in employment is expected. Overall, the dental health of the nation has improved because of the addition of fluoride to the drinking water. In addition, improved dental education has reduced the number of cavities and other dental problems. Because of this improved dental health, fewer people are expected to need a full set of dentures. Instead they will need bridges or crowns on their teeth. This should contribute to the need for dental lab technicians. Opportunities for technicians experienced in partial denture, ceramics or crown and bridge work will be in greatest demand.

In Illinois, there were about 1,420 people employed in this small occupation in 2000.

■ Salaries

Nationally, the median wage for dental laboratory technicians is \$13.45 per hour. Half of all technicians earn between \$10.18 and \$17.61 per hour. In Illinois, the median wage is \$14.58 per hour. Self-employed dental laboratory technicians usually earn more than those who work for clinics. Wages tend to be higher for technicians who do a wide range of procedures rather than specialize.

■ Related Careers

The following careers involve similar work with one's hands: biomedical equipment technician, prosthetic/orthotic technician, and optical technician.

■ Differences in Training

Most dental laboratory technicians learn on the job. Training is also available at community and junior colleges, vocational-technical institutes, and through the military. Programs vary greatly, both in length and in the skills they teach. Nationally, there are 25 programs in dental laboratory technology that are approved by the dental industry. These programs teach dental materials science, oral anatomy, building procedures, and ethics. They also include some type of supervised practical experience. Graduates of two-year programs must have hands-on training to become fully qualified. The amount of hands-on training depends on how much training students had in school and if they had training in the lab's specialty. Employers may train recent hires in their specialty area.

■ Related Educational Programs

The programs of study listed below are the recommended areas of study to pursue for this occupation. Clicking on these will lead to files that show in-state and national schools that offer these programs.

The following link(s) will take you to CIS for more information. CIS requires an ID and password that can be obtained at <http://cis.ilworkinfo.com/loginhelp/login.asp>

[Dental Laboratory Technology](#)

■ Credentials

Certification is optional. It is rarely required for employment or advancement. However, it is a sign that technicians have a certain level of skill. Certification is available in five specialty areas: crowns and bridges, ceramics, partial dentures, complete dentures, and orthodontic appliances. To qualify, applicants must graduate from an accredited dental laboratory technology program and have two years of professional experience or have five years of work experience as a dental technician and successfully complete written and practical exams. The only ADA-accredited program offered in Illinois is at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale.

■ Advanced Training

A bachelor's degree in dental laboratory technology is offered at: Louisiana State University, New Orleans, Louisiana; and University of Texas, San Antonio, Texas.

Through continuing education, most technicians advance by moving into management, buying into private dental laboratories, or working on commission.

■ Resources

American Dental Association
Commission on Dental Accreditation
211 E. Chicago Avenue
Phone: 312.440.2500
E-mail: mediarelations@ada.org
Chicago, IL 60611
<http://www.ada.org>
Select "Teachers & Students." Click on "Career Resources" in the left side bar.

The ADA Foundation offers up to five scholarships in the amount of \$1,000 to students in an accredited dental laboratory technology program. Applicant must demonstrate financial need.

National Board for Certification in Dental
Laboratory Technology
1530 Metropolitan Blvd.
Tallahassee, FL 32308
Phone: 800.684.5310
E-mail: nbc@nabl.org
<http://www.nabl.org/html/certification.html>

National Association of Dental Laboratories
1530 Metropolitan Blvd.
Tallahassee, FL 32308
Phone: 800.950.1150
E-mail: nabl@nabl.org
<http://www.nabl.org>
Click on "Main Page" then on "Thinking About a Career in Dental Technology?"