

How to Select the Best Specialty Dental Patient Chair for Your Practice

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Although patient comfortability is a concern, close access to the patient oral cavity is essential for improved treatment and ergonomics for the dentist. The primary purpose of the dental patient chair is to deliver the oral cavity to the dentist in a stable and ergonomic fashion. All chair design considerations should be based on maintaining this objective. Treatment capabilities should enable and accommodate restorative to endodontic use. The following are important design considerations for patient chair selection:

#1 Headrest Design

The headrest should be thin to enable optimal access to the patient. It should allow the operator to slide their knees comfortably underneath the headrest to prevent reaching or strained movements while performing treatment. The headrest should be double-articulating and provide two pivot points for infinite positioning based on placement for procedure need. A slightly cupped U-shape design of the upholstery can support the patient's head properly while still allowing the operator to turn their head to either side for better access.

#2 Thin and Narrow Backrest

A proper chair design objective includes the concept of a thin and narrow backrest. The thin and narrow design will allow both a dentist and assistant to sit more comfortably closer to the chair and their legs to slide slightly underneath. The goal is to be able to sit in close proximity and maintain an ergonomic upright position. The narrow backrest is a key consideration for the dental assistant who needs close proximity to the side of the chair to avoid reaching and extending their body.

#3 Patient Positioning with traverse feature

Since patients come in all sizes, the chair length and width need to provide for a range of body widths and heights comfortably. A traverse feature allows the reclined patient to be moved laterally forward and backward to allow the dental team to remain in their ideal working positions. They can then be able to access instrument delivery and work trays with enough space between the top of the headrest and the wall so the team can move between them with ease. A traverse feature that allows the chair to glide horizontally forward and backward is a highly desirable function to enable proper patient positioning.

#4 Swivel Feature, Base Design, and Room Design

A must-have feature for microscopic dentistry is a smooth gliding swivel feature for your patient chair. The dentist will be able to change the view within the microscope without using their hand to move the scope. By slightly rotating the chair side-to-side, the dentist can alter their view of the patient's oral cavity.

Additional considerations for selecting the best dental patient chair are room size and design. Room size with a smaller space will require a smaller footprint of the chair. Room design considerations depend on if the room has a single or dual entry and how much space will be consumed by fixed cabinets. Mobile/modular cabinets can provide flexibility to move around the chair as needed. A swivel feature is essential as it can allow the chair to pivot to the right or left by usually around 30 degrees to each side. Use the swivel feature to position the patient chair diagonally and take advantage of the best length of space in your room. Even smaller room sizes can be utilized for single entry room use and still enable egress for the dental assistant.

#5 Height Adjustment and Weight Capacity

For optimal treatment, the chair should provide an enhanced operating height range that will allow the chair to adjust low enough for the operator's arms to remain down but elevated at a height to perform cosmetic or other procedures in a comfortable, stand-up position. Additionally, as patients have become more robust in recent decades, so must the chair. An ideal weight carrying capacity of the chair should be a minimum of 300 lbs. to accommodate heavier patients. The mechanical structure of the chair must be sturdy and have a heavy-duty hydraulic system or lifting mechanism.

#6 Low-Profile Armrests with Locking Feature

Armrests provide valuable comfort for patients and should be considered a requirement for any chairs used for restorative dental treatment. First, the armrests give patients something to do with their hands while seated. Second, the armrest should fold down for the patient to enter or exit the chair but still provide a stable point for them to lift off or lower themselves down into the chair. Once the patient is comfortably seated in the chair, the armrest should lift and lock into place.

#7 Upholstery Design

The best patient chairs have high-grade upholstery that is durable and resistant to scuffs and tears. The upholstery should be a smooth design without excessive stitching or tiny patterns that make cleaning difficult. Dental chairs should have top-of-the-line foam that will enhance patient comfort during lengthy procedures.

#8 Adaptable to Patient Needs

There are times when the dental patient chair needs to be versatile to accommodate specific needs:

Wheelchair Use – Some patients use a wheelchair where it is not practical to transfer them to the dental chair. In these cases, use a dual-purpose headrest that allows the backrest of the patient chair in the upright position and the headrest flipped 180 degrees, so it is facing out. The wheelchair can be positioned at the back of the patient chair with the patient's head in the headrest while the operator works in a stand-up position.

Pediatric Use – Use a patient chair with a positioning aid such as a pedo booster for younger pediatric patients by placing it onto the upholstery.

All in all, taking all of these design features in mind will help you to select the best patient chair for your practice. Ergonomics are not only critical to your health, but your dental team's as well. Considering these design features and incorporating them into your dental practice from the beginning will save you and your team from discomfort and injury.