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## REPLACEMENT OF MISSING TEETH

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## **Q. Why should I replace missing teeth?**

**A.** There are many reasons for replacing missing teeth, the first being your appearance. Another reason is that the gap left by a missing tooth can mean more strain is put on the other teeth. A gap can also mean that your 'bite' is affected, because the teeth next to the space can lean into the gap and change the way the upper and lower teeth bite together. This can lead to food getting packed into the gap, which can cause tooth decay and gum disease.

## **Q. How are missing teeth replaced?**

**A.** This depends on the number of teeth missing and on where they are in your mouth. The condition of the remaining teeth that you still have also affects the decision.

There are three main ways to replace missing teeth:

- The first is with a 'removeable false tooth (or teeth)' – called a partial denture.
- The second is with a fixed bridge. A bridge is usually used when there are fewer teeth to replace, or when there are teeth present either side of the missing tooth/teeth.
- The third way is by the use of dental 'implants'. This is where the artificial root is placed into the bone of the jaw and a crown or bridge is placed on top of this.

## **Q. What is a partial denture?**

**A.** This is a removeable plate (it can be taken out and put back in) with one or more false teeth on it. It may be all plastic or a mixture of plastic and metal. Both types can have clips (clasps) to help the denture stay in place in your mouth.

Depending on where the clips are, some of them may show when you smile or open your mouth.

## **Q. What is the difference between a plastic partial denture and one that contains metal?**

**A.** Plastic partial dentures are less expensive to have. But unless they are designed carefully, they may cause damage to the teeth they fit against. They are different types of plastic material that can be used, some which are more flexible and lighter. Your dentist can advise you on what would work best for you.

Metal partial dentures are usually made from an alloy of cobalt and chromium, and they are much stronger. They can be supported by the remaining teeth. Although the base is metal, they have gum-coloured plastic and natural looking teeth fixed to them. They are more expensive than plastic dentures.

### **Q. How do I choose the best type for me?**

**A.** Be guided by your dentist. They will know the condition of your remaining teeth and what will work best for you. In most cases, a metal-based partial denture gives the best results.

### **Q. Can I get an immediate fixed replacement fitted straight away after having a tooth removed?**

**A.** It can take up to 6 months for your gums and bone to heal properly after an extraction. It is therefore better to wait to have a fixed replacement such as a bridge or an implant. In the interim, your dentist can provide you with a temporary denture to replace the gap. In specific cases, you can have an 'immediate implant' placed in the space where the tooth is taken out. Ask your dentist if this option can work for you.

### **Q. How do I look after my denture?**

**A.** Dentures are removeable from your mouth. They should be taken out after every meal and cleaned. The general rule is: brush, soak and brush again. Always clean your denture over a bowl of water or a folded towel in case you drop it.

- Brush your dentures before soaking them, to help remove any bits of food. Most dentists advise brushing the denture using a small-to medium-headed toothbrush under warm water. Make sure you clean all the surfaces of the denture, including the surface which fits against your gums. This is especially important if you use any kind of denture fixative.
- Using an effervescent (fizzy) denture cleaner will help remove stubborn stains and leave your denture feeling fresher.
- It is important to follow the manufacturer's instructions when using the denture cleaner, and do not use these cleaners if you have a metal denture or your denture has been relined.
- Brush the denture again, as you would your own teeth, being careful not to scrub too hard as this may cause grooves in the surface. If you notice a build-up of stains or scale, have your denture cleaned by your dental team.

## **Q. Should I take my denture out at night?**

**A.** Your dental team may recommend taking out your dentures at night to give your mouth a chance to rest. If you do this, it is important to leave it in water to prevent any warping or cracking.

## **Q. What are the alternatives to a partial denture?**

**A.** As mentioned previously, the alternatives are a fixed bridge or a dental implant.

A dental bridge is made by putting crowns on the teeth at either side of the gap, and then joining these two crowns together by placing a false tooth in the space. This is all made in the laboratory and then pieces are cemented into place with special adhesives. The bridge is 'fixed' and cannot be removed. These bridges can be made of precious metal bonded to porcelain or from newer, more aesthetic materials such as all-ceramic or glass (metal-free) which have great strength once fixed to the teeth.

## **Q. What if I don't want my remaining teeth drilled in order to replace a gap?**

**A.** Adhesive bridges are another way of 'bridging the gap', and much less tooth tissue needs to be removed. These bridges are made up of a false tooth with metal/porcelain 'wings' on either side.

These wings are made to bond (stick) to the teeth on either side of the gap, usually with very little drilling needed. Instead the teeth are roughened slightly and the bridge is fitted using a very strong cement.

## **Q. Can I always have a bridge to replace missing teeth?**

**A.** You can have a bridge only if you have enough strong teeth either side of the gap with good bone support.

Your dental team will help you decide what the best way is to replace your missing teeth.

## **Q. What are bridges made of?**

**A.** Bridges are usually made of porcelain bonded to metal, gold (if aesthetics is not an issue), strong ceramic materials or glass materials (no metal is present in the all ceramic or glass bridges), which can be more aesthetic.

### **Q. What will the bridge cost?**

**A.** The cost will vary depending on the size and type of the bridge that you need. Always discuss the cost before starting the treatment and get a written estimate if required. Although a bridge may seem expensive, it should last many years.

### **Q. How do I look after my bridge?**

**A.** You need to clean your bridge every day, to prevent problems such as bad breath and gum disease. You also have to clean under the false tooth every day using a special floss or interdental brushes, because a normal toothbrush cannot reach this area. Your dental team will show you how to do this.

### **Q. Can I have teeth which attach to my jawbone?**

**A.** Yes, by having dental implants. This treatment means that you may be able to replace missing teeth without needing crowns on other teeth.

The dental implant is used to support one or more false teeth. It is a titanium screw that can replace the root of a tooth which is missing/has been removed. Just like a tooth root, it is placed into the jaw bone. Crowns, bridges or fixed dentures can then be placed over the implants. See our leaflet on 'Dental implants' for more details.

### **Q. Are there any other methods for fixing false teeth?**

**A.** In certain cases, you can have a combination of crowns and partial dentures that can keep the denture more stable and the retaining clips out of sight. These are quite specialised dentures, so you should ask your dental team about them and whether these would be a suitable option for you.



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