

Bridges, implants, and dentures

Do you hide your smile because you are missing teeth? Is it hard for you to chew food? If you have problems because of missing teeth, see your dentist. Together, you can talk about choices that may help fix your smile.

BRIDGES

Bridges are used when 1 or a few teeth are missing. They replace the missing tooth or teeth with false ones. A permanent or fixed bridge is cemented onto specially prepared teeth on either side of the space. Sometimes, though, a removable bridge can be used. A removable bridge clips to the teeth on both sides of the space. You can put a removable bridge in and take it out yourself.

Most of the time, a removable bridge has an acrylic base with metal clasps or a frame that is made of cast metal. Permanent or fixed bridges can be made from metal, ceramics, or a combination of the two. False teeth are mounted onto the base of a bridge to fill the space where the teeth are missing.

IMPLANTS

Implants are metal tooth roots that are placed into the jawbone through minor surgery. The bone and gums grow around the implant to hold it in place. A single false tooth, called a crown, can be screwed onto a single implant. More than 1 implant also can be placed. These implants can attach to a bridge or denture when more than 1 tooth is missing. Implants are not meant to come out.

DENTURES

Full dentures (sometimes called *false teeth*) may be used to restore the smile when all natural teeth have been lost. The denture looks like a full set of teeth mounted on an acrylic base made to look like gums. Dentures can be held in place with implants or by a seal that forms between the denture base and the gums with saliva, along with the muscles of your cheeks and tongue. Sometimes adhesives (or denture creams) may be used to help hold the denture in place.

GETTING THE RIGHT FIT

New bridges or dentures may feel strange at first. They should become comfortable over time. Never try to fix the way a bridge or denture feels in your mouth or force a removable bridge into place. Your dentist will work with you to help you get a good fit.

Some people's mouths feel sore after getting a bridge or dentures. Let your dentist know if your mouth feels sore. He or she may need to adjust the fit of your bridge or denture.

TAKING CARE OF YOUR SMILE

Whether you have a bridge, wear dentures, or have your own teeth, you have to take care of your smile. Plaque, a thin film of bacteria, forms on your teeth, gums, and other tissues in your mouth all the time. If not removed, plaque can cause tooth decay, gum disease, and bad breath. To take care of your mouth:

- brush your teeth, gums, tongue, and roof of your mouth every morning with a soft-bristled brush before you put in your bridge or dentures. This will help the blood flow into the tissues of your mouth and remove plaque;
- rinse your removable bridge or dentures before brushing to remove any loose food or debris;
- use a soft-bristled toothbrush and a nonabrasive cleanser to gently brush your bridge or dentures;
- gently brush your natural teeth with a fluoride-containing toothpaste and a soft-bristled toothbrush twice a day for 2 minutes. Clean between your teeth daily with floss or another product used to clean between the teeth;
- always look for the American Dental Association Seal of Acceptance on products, a symbol of safety and effectiveness;
- visit your dentist regularly. ■

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