

Why should I have missing teeth replaced?

Your appearance is one reason. Another is that the gap left by a missing tooth can mean greater strain is placed on the teeth at either side. A gap can also mean that your 'bite' is affected, because the teeth next to the space can lean into the gap and alter the way in which upper and lower teeth bite together. This could then lead to food getting packed into the gap, causing both tooth decay and gum disease.

How can missing teeth be replaced?

This depends on the number of teeth missing and on where they are located in the mouth. The condition of the other teeth may also affect the decision.

There are two main ways to replace missing teeth. The first is with a removable false tooth or teeth known as a partial denture. The second is with a fixed bridge. A bridge is usually used where there are fewer teeth to replace, or when the missing teeth are on one side of the mouth only.

What is a partial denture?

This is a plate with a number of false teeth on it. It may be all made of plastic or a mixture of plastic and metal. Both types may have clips (clasps), to keep the denture in place in the mouth. Depending on where they are, some of these clips may show when you smile or open your mouth.

What is the difference between a plastic partial denture and one that contains metal?

While plastic partial dentures are less expensive to make, unless they are made very carefully, they could damage the teeth they are placed against.

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

How do I choose the best type for me?

Be guided by your dentist, as they will know the condition of your remaining teeth they will be able to advise you on your individual situation. In most cases a metal-based partial denture will give the best result.

Can I have a bridge fitted straight after having a tooth removed?

In many people it can take up to six months for the gums to heal properly after an extraction. This means that you may need to wear a temporary denture for 6 months before the bridge can be fitted.

Cont./...

How should I look after my denture?

The general rule is: brush, soak, brush. Always clean your dentures over a bowl of water or a folded towel in case you drop them. Brush your dentures before you soak them, to help remove any food debris. The use of an effervescent denture cleaner will help remove stubborn stains and leave your denture feeling fresher. Make sure you always follow the manufacturer's instructions then brush the dentures again, as you would your own teeth, being careful not to scrub too hard as this may cause grooves to appear in the surface of the denture.

Most dentists advise using a small to medium headed toothbrush and toothpaste. Make sure you clean all the surfaces of the dentures, including the surface which comes into contact with your gums. This is especially important if you use any kind of denture fixative.

If you notice a build up of stains or scale, you should have your denture cleaned by your dentist or hygienist.

Should I take my denture out at night?

Your dentist may recommend removing your dentures at night to give your mouth a chance to rest. If you remove your dentures, it is important to put them in water to prevent any warping or cracking.

What is the alternative to a partial denture?

The main alternative is a fixed bridge. This is made by putting crowns on the teeth at either side of the space, and then joining these two crowns together by placing a false tooth in the space.

A fixed bridge is all made in the laboratory and then cemented into place with special adhesives. The bridge cannot be removed for cleaning.

Another option is an adhesive bridge. This has wings that are bonded to the back of the supporting teeth with very little drilling involved.

Can I always choose to have a bridge fitted to replace missing teeth?

Bridges are only possible if you have enough strong teeth with good bone support. Your dentist will help you decide which the best way of replacing any missing teeth is.

What are bridges made of?

Bridges are usually made of porcelain bonded to precious metal. Sometimes, there may be other, non-precious metals used in the base for strength. A new type of bridge made entirely of a special type of strong porcelain.

What would a bridge cost?

Costs will vary according to the size and type of bridge you need. You should always get a written estimate and treatment plan before beginning any dental treatment; remember that although a bridge may seem expensive it should last many years.

Cont./...

How do I look after my bridge?

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. Your dentist or hygienist will show you how to use a bridge needle or special floss, because a normal toothbrush may not allow you to reach all areas properly.

Are there other methods available for fixing false teeth?

There are other methods, such as using a combination of crowns and partial dentures so that the retaining clip is kept out of sight. These are quite specialised dentures, so you should ask your dentist about them.

Can I have teeth which are attached to the jawbone?

Yes, by having implants. The success of this technique means you may be able to replace missing teeth without crowning other teeth. See our leaflet "Tell me about Implants" for more details. Remember that it is as important for you to care for your remaining teeth as it is to replace the missing ones.