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# A Reason to Smile

Replacing missing teeth can radically improve a person's smile and quality of life. Whether you're young, old, or in-between, dentures can help improve the way you look, feel, eat, and speak. It can even help your self-confidence.

## What is a denture?

A denture is a custom-made removable replacement for missing teeth and adjacent tissues. It is made of acrylic resin, sometimes in combination with various metals. A full or complete denture replaces all of the teeth, while a partial denture fills in the spaces created by missing teeth and prevents other teeth from changing position.

## What causes tooth loss?

Patients can become entirely edentulous (without teeth) due to many reasons, the most prevalent being removal because of dental disease (e.g., periodontal disease and tooth decay). Other reasons include tooth developmental defects caused by severe malnutrition, genetic defects, trauma, or drug use.

## Who needs a denture?

Both younger patients and older patients can be fitted for dentures. Candidates for complete dentures have lost most or all of their teeth. A partial denture is suitable for those who have some natural teeth remaining. Dentures can help patients in a number of ways, including:

- Mastication—chewing ability is improved by replacing edentulous areas with dentures.
- Aesthetics—the presence of teeth provides a natural facial appearance. Wearing a denture to replace missing teeth provides support for the lips and cheeks, correcting the collapsed appearance that occurs after losing teeth.
- Phonetics—replacing missing teeth helps improve pronunciation of syllables and vowels.
- Self-esteem—patients feel better about themselves.

## How do you care for dentures?

A denture is fragile, so it is important to handle it with care. Remove and brush the denture daily, preferably with a brush designed specifically for cleaning dentures, using a denture cleanser. Never use harsh, abrasive cleansers, including toothpastes, because they may scratch the surface of the denture, leaving it susceptible to plaque and stains. Don't sterilize your denture with boiling water because it will cause it to become



warped. If you wear a partial denture, be sure to remove it before brushing your natural teeth.

## Why do I have to clean my dentures?

Keeping your dentures clean is vital for good oral health and overall health. Like natural teeth, dentures attract plaque, become stained, and collect food particles that can cause bad breath or irritate your gums.

## Should dentures be worn at night?

If you're new to wearing dentures, your dentist may advise you to wear it almost constantly during the first two weeks—even while you sleep. Under normal circumstances, however, it is considered best to remove it at night. Removing the denture at night allows the gum tissue to rest and allows normal stimulation and cleansing by the tongue and saliva. Clean your dentures in cleanser solution, as directed by your dentist. When not in use, you should soak your dentures in water. Get in the habit of keeping the denture in the same safe and handy place to reduce the likelihood of misplacing it.

## How often should I see my dentist?

It is important to continue having regular dental checkups so your dentist can examine your oral tissues for signs of disease or cancer. As you age, your mouth will continue to change. To maintain a proper fit over time, it may be necessary to adjust or possibly remake your denture. Never attempt to adjust a denture yourself. When in doubt, consult your dentist.