

Denture Care

What is a denture?

Dentures are a set of replacement teeth. They are fitted exactly to each person's mouth. Although they are very strong, dropping them even a few inches can break them.

Why are dentures important?

Dentures do the same work as natural teeth. Dentures can improve the ability to chew and speak, as well as provide support for facial muscles, cheeks, and lips. A good fitting denture will allow you to chew your food properly, and reduce the risk of choking during a meal.

What can I do to get used to my dentures?

New dentures can feel strange, especially when you get your first ones. Talk to your dentist about what to expect when wearing and caring for them. Ask how the dentures will feel while you are getting used to them, and how you can tell if something is wrong. Be patient while adjusting to them. Practice your speech by reading the paper out loud.

At first, it helps to eat soft food that isn't sticky. Cut your food into small pieces and chew slowly. It is best to divide your food up evenly on both sides of your mouth. You may notice that certain foods don't taste the same or that they need more seasoning. Be particularly careful not to eat food that is too hot. Dentures may make your mouth less sensitive to hot foods and liquids. Also, be careful of food with bones because your mouth may be less sensitive to hard objects. Avoid nuts and seeds that may slip under the dentures and cause irritation.

How do I clean my dentures?

Dentures need to be taken out of the mouth for cleaning. It is often convenient to take them out at bedtime, let them soak in warm (not hot) water or a denture-cleansing solution overnight, and then brush them in the morning. If you are not comfortable taking your dentures out of your mouth for long periods of time, it's OK to take them out only long enough to clean them. It is healthier to leave them out of your mouth overnight or for several hours, however, to avoid too much pressure on the soft tissues and bone of your mouth and jaw.

It's a good idea to brush your dentures over a wash basin half full of water. If they slip from your fingers, they are less likely to crack if they land in water. Always use a special denture brush that will reach all parts of the dentures. A regular toothbrush will not do the job as well. You can use soap, toothpaste, or bicarbonate of soda to clean dentures, but denture paste removes stains better. (Don't ever use a denture-cleaning toothpaste to clean your natural teeth. It's too abrasive.) Make sure you clean the inside of the denture as well as the tooth side.

Always soak dentures when they are out of your mouth. Dentures that get dry may shrink or warp or be more likely to break. While your dentures are out of your mouth, clean your tongue, gums, and the roof of your mouth with a soft toothbrush and rinse thoroughly.

Denture relining

Over time, your gums will probably shrink a little and your dentures will no longer fit as well as they used to. Also, a weight loss or gain of 5 pounds or more can affect how your dentures fit. You may develop sore spots where they begin to rub. Ill-fitting dentures can irritate the gums, tongue and cheek, and even cause the ridges of gum tissue to shrink. This will make the denture looser and can speed up the destruction of the bone that you need to hold your denture in place. People who have ill-fitting dentures may not eat a healthy diet.

Signs that your dentures may need attention are:

- Looseness
- Bad odor
- Stains and tartar deposits both inside and out
- Food trapped under the dentures
- A sore spot in your mouth
- Cracks in the denture base or chipped teeth

Properly fitting dentures should not need adhesives or cushion pads. Your dentures may need to be relined, or even replaced, after a number of years. See your dentist if your dentures do not fit well or are uncomfortable.

Dental exams

See your dentist regularly because your mouth is continually changing. Your dentist will check your mouth, tongue, gum ridges, and jaw joints for other problems and adjust your dentures. It is very important that red or white spots or other sores in the mouth that do not go away within 2 weeks are checked by your dentist within a few days.

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