LEARNING TO WEAR AND CARE FOR YOUR NEW DENTURES

Your New Dentures and Your Oral Health

The following suggestions have been developed by the University of Iowa, College of Dentistry. They are presented to help you use and enjoy your new dentures and to maintain the oral health necessary for denture wearing in the years to come.

Getting Accustomed to Your New Dentures

Successful denture wearing begins with a period of “Getting to Know” your new dentures. At first they will feel bulky and unnatural, no matter how thin and carefully they are made. Your tongue may feel crowded and you may experience excessive saliva in your mouth. The dentures may move at first or become dislodged while you speak or chew. As you wear them, you will learn to keep them in place with the muscles of your cheeks and tongue.

Eating

Eating with new dentures is a skill that takes patience to learn. Begin with soft, easy-to-chew foods to develop “good coordination” before you try tougher foods.

Chew on your back teeth and try to put some food on both sides of your mouth for best results. (Most patients find that biting is best done with a knife and fork rather than your front teeth). This also spares the delicate front area of your gums from heavy biting pressure that may cause damage.

On the easy-to-bite foods, try biting off a mouthful by applying pressure backwards against the front teeth while closing.

Be sure to bite through the food fully. Don’t try to pull or break off the food.

Artificial dentures, like artificial arms or legs, are not perfect replacements for what has been lost. It has been shown that dentures at best are only 25% as efficient in eating as your natural teeth were. For the most successful denture use now and for years to come, adjust your eating patterns to include you can manage well.

Speaking

Practice Practice Practice! Sometimes the presence of teeth where there was once a space can make a difference in the way you speak certain words. Practice speaking with your new dentures by reading aloud or talking on the phone.

Try to avoid movements that raise or lower the dentures, or cause them to click together (over time, you will learn what doesn’t work for you).

Remember….others will not be as aware of the little changes in your speech as you are!

Wear - time

We would like you to leave your dentures out at night in the container and instructions you have been given. Leaving them out gives a period of normal stimulation and cleansing by the tongue and saliva, allowing the gums to get back to normal after wearing your denture all day.

It is important to give your mouth 6-8 hours of rest from the dentures each day. This will help keep your mouth healthy and fit for denture wearing many years to come.

Appearance

When you first receive your new dentures your facial expression may seem different. Over time, the muscles of your cheeks and lips will adjust and begin to function more normally allowing your natural expression to return.

It is very easy to be critical of your new dentures until you have worn them a few weeks and worked on getting comfortable with them. Remember….they are meant to appear natural in the normal movements in your face (this was taken into consideration during the fitting appointments) and may mean they will seem uneven or asymmetrical when viewed in exaggerated expressions or while outside the mouth. Many people don’t really look at the details of their face until they have dentures (everything is different than you remember). To achieve the most natural appearance, the denture should blend in with your own distinct facial features, not try to perfect them.

In the beginning stages of wearing your new dentures, you may be somewhat self-conscious about your appearance, but as time goes by, you will forget them and be able to focus on activities and work. Your lips, cheeks, and tongue will eventually be more comfortable with your new dentures being in your mouth. Your confidence will begin to grow and eventually you won’t be as aware of them – allowing you to feel good about your smile again!
When dentures are new, **Sore Spots** on the gums often develop. The denture must be "Broken-In" by the dentist with adjustments. That is why you are asked to come back for one or more appointments after you get your dentures. Only by wearing them will you be able to tell where the "Sore Spots" will occur.

Although your dentist will tell you that you need to "get-adjusted" to your dentures by wearing them, no one expects you to get comfortable with the pain. If soreness develops at any time, we want to know.

Soreness that develops months or years after you get your dentures is also important. If pain comes and goes, ask yourself what may have caused it. Many patients get sore gums after chewing particularly tough foods or forgetting to leave their dentures out at night. If soreness persists, your dentist will be glad to see you for a check-up and adjustment if necessary.

**Cleaning**

Just like natural teeth, your dentures must be kept clean and fresh to avoid staining and bad breath. A good routine including rinsing or brushing as needed during the day and a good, thorough cleaning once a day – usually at bedtime will be helpful.

A toothbrush made especially for dentures is most effective for thorough cleaning. Most drugstores stock these brushes. Use the **Shorter Bristles** to brush food residues from the chewing surfaces and sides of the teeth. Use the **Longer Bristles** for cleaning the inside of the dentures, they will get into the deep or narrow spaces to remove saliva, or food deposits (some you may not even be able to see). Use plain soap, or special denture cleaning paste (Regular toothpaste – will cause damage to your dentures). No matter what else you use to clean your dentures, begin with a thorough brushing.

**But be careful! – Dentures are Breakable!**

It is best to fill the sink ½ full of water and hold the denture close to the water while you are cleaning them…..this way if it slips from your hand, the water will break its fall without damaging them.

Soaking the denture in cleansing solution is a good way to keep stains and odor from developing. Commercial tablets or powders are convenient and effective. Many patients find just using plain water after brushing is enough. If your denture becomes badly stained from certain foods, liquids, or smoking, you may wish to see your dentist for advice or assistance. Please do NOT hesitate to do so.

**CAUTION!!!!**

Dentures can be damaged by incorrect cleaning. Never use scouring powder or harsh abrasives; they will scratch the surface of the denture. Do NOT put them in hot water, or run hot water over them….this can cause them to warp or discolor.

**Denture Care**

Two things will affect how long your denture will last for you. In a sense, dentures are like eyeglasses – they are custom-made to fit your prescription. Just like your eyes, your mouth may change with time and your dentures will need to be changed too. Like the lenses and frames of eyeglasses. The materials the denture is made from can wear out too, even if the prescription is unchanged. For either of these reasons, new dentures may be needed.

One way to prolong the life of your dentures is to consistently keep them moist or wet. The materials they are made of are meant to be kept in water, and weaken every time they are allowed to “dry out”. Get in the habit of keeping the dentures in the same safe and handy place daily. **Don’t** “tuck them away” or wrap them in paper, they may be lost or mistakenly thrown out.

Many dentures have been lost in hotels and restrooms. If you must go to the hospital, take along a **denture-cup** with your name on it. Many dentures disappear on hospital food trays at a time when it isn’t easy for you to get another set.

Handle your dentures carefully. They may crack or break when dropped. Although they can be repaired – they are strongest if they have never been broken.

If you are feeling ill and afraid you may vomit, remove your denture. It isn’t uncommon for the denture to be flushed down the toilet. Lastly…..be sure to keep your denture away from your pets.

It is best to keep the denture in water in the same handy place whenever you can. If you must carry your denture with you, wear it, or moisten it with a few drops of water and carry it in a small see-through zip top plastic bag.

**Oral Health Care**
Some patients feel “Now that I have dentures – I’m all set!” But oral healthcare is still important. Some changes in your gums and facial muscles are natural with age and changes in your general health. Let’s look at what you can expect as a denture wearer, and how to keep your oral health as good as possible.

Shrinkage or (resorption) of the gums and ridges of bone under your denture will probably occur. This can lead to settling and loosening of their fit. This happens quickly for some people and very slowly for others – depending on many different factors. One this is certain however, the denture will not change. When a refit or remake of the dentures to fit your “new prescription” is necessary, your dentist can help you. An additional fee will be necessary for relining or remaking the dentures due to oral changes; the original fee does not include this service. *Don’t* try to adjust or reline them yourself – you may destroy their usefulness. And, more importantly, home liners, repairs, or excessive use of denture adhesives can irreversibly damage the ridges in your mouth.

Your general health affects your oral health! Medical conditions such as high blood pressure, sugar diabetes, and digestive disorders affect the fit of your dentures. Weight loss or gain and certain medications also affect the fit of your dentures. As you grow older, your age can have its effects on the tissues of your mouth, much as it does on the skin of your hands and face. Some women denture wearers find that menopause, or change of life period, can bring oral changes as well.

**To do your best to minimize these natural changes and maintain good oral health – follow these tips:**

- Always keep your dentures OUT at night
- Keep gum tissue healthy. Use a soft toothbrush or your finger tip to massage your gums, upper and lower in all areas once a day
- Avoid commercial mouth washes. Instead rinse and gargle with warm salt water (1t of salt to 8oz of water) after your gum massage each night
- Use a soft toothbrush to cleanse your tongue if necessary.
- Keep your dentures clean.

If you have a partial denture or an over-denture, you have a valuable possession well worth keeping – Your Remaining Natural Teeth! Clasps and dentures that sit against these teeth can act as “food-traps”, and make it even more important to clean your mouth well. Be sure to remove the denture or partial-denture before brushing your natural teeth. Give extra brushing attention to the areas around the gum-line. If you notice bleeding when you brush thoroughly, see your dentist to learn and clean your natural teeth correctly. Dentures can substitute for what is lost, but their most important function is to preserve what remains.

And don’t forget to see your dentist for a check-up every year. Even if your dentures fit perfect, he or she can check you for oral cancer and any changes in your gum tissue, and any other oral health conditions. You may have many sets of dentures in your lifetime, but will have only 1 set of healthy gums and bone to support them!

**A Word to Older Patients**

Your age may be an important factor in how well you become adjusted to your new dentures. Don’t believe in the saying “You can’t teach an old dog new tricks”. Many older people become well adjusted to their new dentures in a very short time. In many cases the older patient will become more quickly adjusted than the younger patient. There is no magic age where the line is drawn when you can say, all above this line are old and all below this line are young. However, age does many times play tricks on us. We become set in our ways, we rebel against change, we dislike being bothered getting acquainted with something new. Possible our ability to tolerate new things is less than it was when it was 30 or 40 years ago.

Dentures should help you feel some of the enjoyments of your youth, like a nice appearance and the ability to eat well. Remember, the first few days are the hardest. Don’t try to “get used to them” by wearing them in a dresser drawer! Take it slow and easy, and your dentures will have so many benefits that it will be well worth the effort.

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