

Replacing a Missing Tooth

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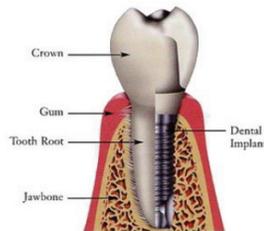
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Are you missing a tooth you wish you had back? Modern dentistry has excellent options to successfully replace missing teeth. Dental bridges and implants are permanently fixed in the mouth, as opposed to removable partial dentures, that can be taken out. Generally speaking, patients are more satisfied with a permanently fixed replacement because a solid tooth is created, as opposed to one that generally isn't as stable.

Bridges and implants are also important for the health of the tissue and gums. When teeth are missing, the remaining teeth will eventually shift into the area of the missing tooth. As the process progresses, the probability of acquiring periodontal disease increases. In addition, new tooth positions change the way the teeth fit together, resulting in a different bite and possible jaw joint (TMJ) problems. Lastly, the appearance of a permanently fixed replacement usually is superior to a removable option.

Dental Implants

A dental implant is a prosthetic root replacement, which allows a crown to be placed without involving adjacent teeth. The implant is painlessly placed in bone, and may require several months to integrate or heal to the bone. Subsequently, a permanent crown is placed providing a functioning, esthetic tooth on the implant. The diagram illustrates how a natural tooth and root (left half of the tooth) closely compares to an implant (right half of the tooth). Due to the required bone integration period, a disadvantage to implants is that treatment time may be longer. However, the bone integration provides the advantage of helping preserve bone in the original missing tooth area. In addition, an implant is easier to clean around.



Dental Bridges

A dental bridge is similar to a bridge used to connect two pieces of land. In the mouth, dentists typically use the tooth in front and in back of the missing tooth as anchors for the bridge by placing crowns on each tooth. An esthetic, tooth-colored crown is connected to our anchor crowns to "bridge the gap". The result is a prosthetic tooth that looks and functions like a natural tooth. A definite advantage over implants is the treatment time usually requires only 2 appointments in about a one month time span. The disadvantage is that the anchor teeth require preparation, or a reduction in size. The diagram shows a bridge about to be placed over the prepared teeth. The size reduction of the anchor teeth allows proper contour, esthetics, and strength of the bridge.



If you are missing a tooth, visit your dentist to evaluate the bone, gums, and teeth in the area of the missing tooth. These factors are an important aspect in determining which option may be better for you.

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