



CBRProsthodontics

specialist dental aesthetics and function

Replacing Missing Teeth

Do I have to replace missing teeth? What are my options?



Do I have to replace a missing tooth?

No, it is not always necessary to replace missing teeth. We normally consider that teeth may need replacement if there is a functional or aesthetic need for a replacement. Where such a need does not exist, tooth replacement is not necessary, but you may choose to do so if you wish.



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Functional reasons for tooth replacement

Teeth perform a number of functions. They are necessary for chewing, and are involved in speech. Teeth also stabilize your bite, and support the lips and cheeks. In this latter function, premature loss of teeth can result in sunken, wrinkled lips and cheeks, which is often seen as a sign of ageing. When teeth are lost, the surrounding teeth can drift or tilt into the resulting space. Teeth in the opposing jaw can also drift into the space. These (often slow) changes can lead to imbalances in the bite which can be related to muscle and joint problems. Spacing between teeth can also result in areas of food packing, which can be quite damaging to gums and ligaments that support teeth. In the worst case, un-replaced missing teeth can lead to the early loss of other adjacent teeth.

Aesthetic needs

Most people feel uncomfortable about having a missing front tooth and are, understandably, keen to have these spaces filled. Upper teeth as far back as the first molar are visible when most people smile, and you may wish to consider replacing these teeth if they are lost. People with larger smiles can show even more teeth. Aesthetic reasons for tooth replacement are very much an individual choice.

Our goals for tooth replacement

If you decide to replace a missing tooth, you will have a number of treatment options available to you. For each path that you may choose, we will have a number of goals that we will wish to achieve. In general terms, our goals are:

- **To restore/enhance function.** Teeth have important functions. Any tooth replacement needs to be able to perform those functions. We also wish to avoid doing damage (or increase the potential for damage) to other oral structures.
- **Longevity.** No man-made prosthesis (tooth replacement) will last forever. However, some treatment types will be more long-lasting than others, and within each treatment type there will be things that we can do to increase the longevity of the prosthesis. Our goal is to maximize the longevity of your treatment.
- **Aesthetics.** We aim to make our tooth replacements indistinguishable from a natural tooth, or as close to this as possible. Ideally, the highest compliment that anyone can pay to our work is that they don't know its there.
- **Affordability.** We aim to provide the highest quality treatment that we can for each patient, and to do so in the most cost effective manner. While many of these treatments are not inexpensive, we will work with you to achieve the treatment that you wish, in the most economical way.

As you'll see below, the variety of treatment options available have their advantages and disadvantages related to each of these factors

Options for tooth replacement

1. Removable partial dentures

Partial dentures are metal or acrylic plates with teeth attached to replace missing teeth. There are made to show as little as possible of the plate. Metal-framed partial dentures are stronger and less bulky, and tend to be longer lasting and better tolerated by patients.

Advantages: These prostheses are useful for replacing many missing teeth in a jaw, and the treatment is reversible (if you don't like it, you don't wear it). They can be removed for easy cleaning. They can also replace missing gums or reduced gums. Partial dentures are also relatively inexpensive.

Disadvantages: Partial dentures will move under functional loads, and some people find this uncomfortable. They can also show metal clasps used to keep them in place. Some people find partial dentures bulky and uncomfortable, and these prostheses can interfere with taste and speech. Most importantly, wearing a partial denture exposes you to a higher risk of decay and gum disease over time.

Longevity and potential problems: Most problems with dentures relate to breakage. Fractures of the plastic parts of the denture can normally be repaired relatively easily. Damage to metal parts may not be easily repairable. An average life expectancy (50% survival) of metal frame partial dentures is 7 to 10 years.

2. Bridges

Bridges involve the placement of crowns or metal wings on teeth adjacent to the space (retainers) and a false tooth supported by them. The most common (and strongest) restoration used to support bridgework is a full coverage crown. In some circumstances, adhesive retainers, which are much less invasive, can be used.

Advantages: Bridges can be strong and very aesthetic tooth replacements. They are fixed inside the mouth, and most people are unaware of them after they have become used to them. The treatment time is also relatively quicker than other types of tooth replacement.

Disadvantages: Bridges require retainers on adjacent teeth, and these can be rather destructive of tooth structure, especially if the supporting tooth has never been filled. As bridges can involve a number of retainers, and problems with one retainer may require replacement of the whole bridge.

Longevity and potential problems: Resin bonded bridges tend to be less long lasting than more robust designs. Average life expectancies (50% survival) for resin bonded bridges are in the 7 to 10 year range; for simple conventional bridges this range from 12 to 15 years. More complex bridges have slightly reduced longevity.

3. Dental Implants

Dental implants are Titanium screws that are surgically placed into the jaw bone. After a suitable healing period, these can be used to support prostheses made to replace missing teeth. Implants can be used to support a single tooth replacement, or a number of implants can be used to support a bridge. In some cases, multiple implants can be used to support a whole arch of teeth.

Advantages: Dental implant supported prostheses are the closest that we can currently get to natural teeth. In most respects, you will not be able to tell the difference between an Implant-supported tooth replacement, and a real tooth.

Disadvantages: To most people, the major disadvantages involved in implant treatments are the need for surgery, and the time taken for these treatments. In the longest scenario, implant treatment may require 3 minor operations in your mouth (normally done under local anesthetic in the dentist's chair) and may span over 6 to 12 months.

Longevity and potential problems: Implants are potentially the longest-lasting and most predictable prosthesis that we can provide. Over 90% of implant supported prosthesis last longer than 10 years. Manufacturers of the implant systems we use guarantee their components, and will replace it free of charge if it fails prematurely. Not all implants integrate, although success rates are over 95%. Failure of one implant does not normally lead to another failure. However, smoking is noted as a significant risk factor for implant failure, as are uncontrolled diabetes, untreated periodontal disease and some medications for bone disease.

If you have any further questions, please don't hesitate to contact us

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