

Your Dental Health

No. 27 — What You Should Know About Dentures

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Nature intends the permanent teeth to last a lifetime. That's why they are called "permanent."

But teeth are susceptible to damage, wear, disease, abuse and neglect. They may have to be extracted. Then the dentist has to substitute a third set, full dentures.

Efficient as they are, full dentures cannot be expected to function quite as well as healthy, natural teeth. At best, dentures closely simulate the natural functions of teeth — preparing food for digestion, aiding in speech and helping to build facial appearance and personality.

Complete loss of teeth can be a severe shock to anyone. A period of emotional adjustment is usually needed to condition the individual to the fact that he must learn to live with, as well as use his new teeth. Fortunately, using today's materials, the dentist can provide a patient with a service that will restore natural appearance, function and durability.

The success of the transition to dentures depends almost as much on the patient as it does on the skill and scientific knowledge of the dentist. The dentist's broad professional background prepares him to evaluate all aspects of the patient's oral health and their relationship to general health. The patient must be willing to heed the dentist's instructions and advice if the transition to complete dentures is going to succeed.

There is usually no need for patients to experience a toothless period after extractions for a full denture. As soon as the diseased or injured teeth are removed, immediate dentures may be placed. These dentures act as a protective bandage over the tissues, helping them to heal. The patient also sees immediate dentures as a means to continue eating and smiling so that no one need know that he is between fittings.

Personal adjustments are necessary. The new denture wearer may initially have a little difficulty speaking because of the presence of what is essentially foreign material in the mouth. Practice will usually conquer the problem.

The most trying experience for most people with new complete dentures is eating. It is difficult at first to manage both teeth and food. Patience is required, and until control of the new teeth is learned and the gum tissues and ridges have become toughened to pressure, some difficult-to-chew foods may have to be bypassed.

It takes several weeks for the mouth to adjust to the new tasks. Some patients experience very little difficulty; others need more time and counseling from the dentist. Since no two people encounter the exact same difficulties or experience the same satisfaction with full dentures, the patient will have to work together with the dentist in overcoming the various problems. He is in a position to provide the best advice to suit individual needs.

The tissues on which dentures rest are constantly changing. The supporting ridges can recede and shrink away and the dentures, in time, loosen. For this reason,

regular dental checkups are still important.

Dentures, like natural teeth, must be kept clean and free from deposits in order to preserve the health of the mouth. This is another reason to continue periodic visits to the dentist.

The dentures may have to be relined occasionally and, if changes in the mouth are great, replacement of dentures may be necessary after a number of years.

As the tissues change, complete dentures can cause irritation which may lead to infection and inflammation. Ill-fitting dentures can even contribute to the development of oral cancer. A patient or some other inexperienced person should never attempt denture repair or relining.

(Next Article: * "Tooth Transplants and Implants")