

Replacing Missing Teeth

If you're missing one or more teeth, you may be all too aware of their importance to your looks and dental health. Your teeth are designed to work together to help you chew, speak, and smile. When teeth are missing, it is difficult to do these things. Even the loss of a back tooth may cause your mouth to shift and your face to look older. Fortunately, missing teeth can be replaced.

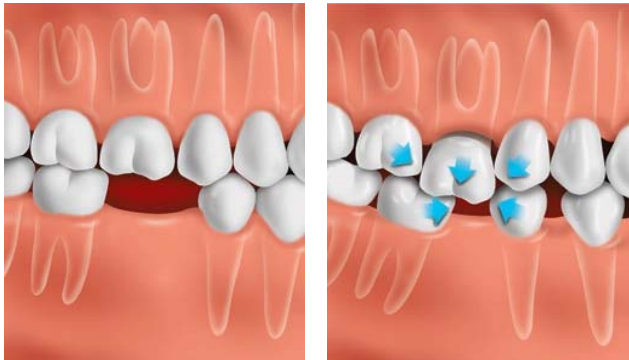
Tooth Replacement Options

The following are three options available, depending on your needs. Replacement teeth should last for years at a time, so it is important to choose a treatment that's right for you.

1. **Implants**
2. **Fixed Bridges**
3. **Removable Partial Dentures**

Leaving a missing tooth as a gap can lead to:

- Drifting of opposing teeth affecting your bite
- Irreversible resorption of the jaw bone
- Tilting of teeth
- Cavities as a result of teeth tilting
- Gum pocketing and localised bone loss
- Loss in bone density



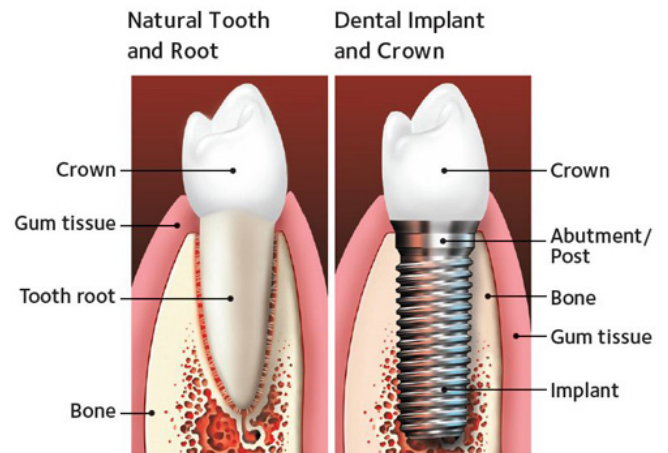
Position of teeth immediately after a tooth is lost

If the tooth is not replaced, other teeth can drift out of position and change the bite. Shifting teeth can possibly lead to tooth decay and gum disease

1. Implants

Many patients choose implants to replace a single tooth, several teeth, or to support a full set of dentures. Implants are posts that are surgically placed in the upper or lower jaw, where they function as a sturdy anchor for replacement teeth. They are made of titanium (a strong, lightweight metal) and other materials that are accepted by the human body.

Most patients find that an implant is secure and stable—a good replacement for their own tooth. However, implants are not an option for everyone. Because implants require surgery, patients should be in good health overall. Patients either must have adequate bone to support the implant, or be able to have surgery to build up the area needing the implant. Patients also should be ready to commit to a daily oral care routine and to regular dental visits. Chronic illnesses, such as diabetes or leukaemia, may slow healing after surgery. Patients with these issues may not be good candidates for implants. Using tobacco can also slow healing or result in loss of the implant.



What is involved?

There are many different kinds of implants. Treatment can take only one day, or it can take several months or somewhere in between.

There are three general phases of implant treatment:

Placement of the implant:

The implant is surgically placed into the jawbone. There may be some swelling and/or tenderness after the surgery, so pain medication is usually prescribed to ease the discomfort. A diet of soft foods is recommended during the healing process.

The healing process:

What makes an implant so strong is that the bone actually grows around it and holds it in place. This process takes time. Some patients might need to wait until the implant is completely healed, up to several months, before replacement teeth can be attached to the implant.

Other patients can have the implants and replacement teeth placed all in one visit. The healing period depends on the clinical situation on a case by case basis.

Replacing your missing tooth or teeth (prosthesis):

A custom-made crown, bridge or denture will be constructed to fit your mouth and your implants. Once completed, the man-made teeth are attached to the implant posts.

The prosthesis usually takes some time to make. In the meantime, you may require a temporary crown, bridge or denture. This can help you eat and speak normally until the permanent replacement is ready.

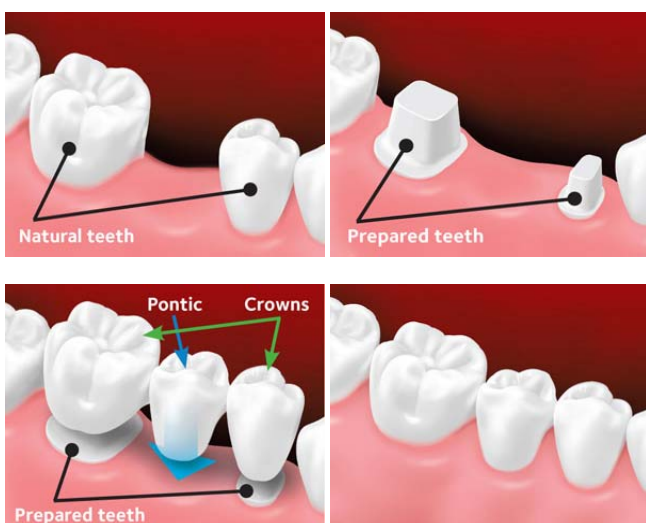
2. Fixed Bridge

Another tooth replacement option is a fixed bridge. This is a restoration that fills the space where one or more teeth have been lost. A fixed bridge is bonded or cemented into place — only a dentist can remove it.

How is a bridge placed?

Placing a bridge usually takes more than one dental visit. On your first visit, the teeth on either side of the gap are prepared and shaped. The bridge will later be attached to these teeth. Impressions of your teeth are taken and the impression is sent to a dental laboratory to construct the bridge out of metal, ceramics, glass-ceramics or a combination. A temporary bridge is placed to protect your exposed teeth while you are waiting for the permanent one (typically 2-3 weeks).

At the second visit, the bridge is fitted, adjusted and cemented in place.



Stages of Fixed Bridge Construction

3. Removable Partial Denture

As its name describes, a removable partial denture can easily be taken out of the mouth for cleaning. Partial dentures usually have replacement teeth fixed to a plastic base that matches the colour of your gums. The plastic base may cover a metal framework. Partial dentures often have some form of clasp that attaches to your natural teeth. Crowns, or “caps,” on your adjacent natural teeth may be required to improve the way a removable partial denture fits your mouth. Getting use to a removable partial denture takes practice, especially placing it in and taking it out. It may feel odd or tight for the first few weeks. But in time, you should get used to it. Never force it into place by biting down. This could bend or break the clasps.

Removable partial dentures should not be worn 24 hours a day as they can lead to oral fungal infections. They must be taken out at bedtime and put it back in when you wake up. Typically first time wearers of removable partial dentures will find them difficult to wear and initial use is a steep learning curve. Follow-up appointments are common and pressure points/sore spots are to be expected. These issues can typically be resolved through denture adjustment appointments though some degree of movement in the denture is sometimes unavoidable.

Once your missing teeth are replaced, eating should be a much more pleasant experience. Since missing teeth can make it difficult to speak clearly, wearing a removable partial denture can help with that, too.

Over time, as you age and your mouth changes, your removable partial denture may no longer fit well and require adjustment or even replacement

Breakages, cracks or chips, or tooth loosening are issues associated with removable partial dentures. Sometimes repairs can be made on the same day; complex repairs may take longer 2-3 days.



Removable Partial Denture replacing missing back teeth

Implants

Advantages:

- An implant is most similar to a natural tooth.
- Nearby teeth do not have to be involved in the placement procedure.
- Implants may last for many years, even decades.
- Some types of implants and artificial teeth or dentures can be placed in just one or two visits.
- Implants may help prevent shrinkage of the jawbone from tooth loss.

Disadvantages:

- Implants are not right for everyone, since they require surgery.
- Implant placement may take longer and may require more dental visits than other options.
- Implants may cost more than other treatments.

Fixed Bridge

Advantages:

- Look, feel and function like natural teeth
- Don't require removal for cleaning
- Cost less than implants

Disadvantages:

- Likely to be more expensive than removable bridges
- Affect the teeth next to the bridge
- Will require extra effort to clean under the pontic

Removable Partial Denture

Advantages:

- Usually less expensive than fixed bridges or implants
- Usually easier to repair than fixed bridges

Disadvantages:

- Can be less stable than other choices
- They can break or be lost
- Can be uncomfortable
- Some people are embarrassed to take out their teeth at night and for cleaning
- May need more frequent replacement than other options
- The loss of additional teeth after a removable denture is fabricated may necessitate the addition of teeth or a completely new denture
- Clasps may be visible