

Maintaining Denture Fit and Comfort



After years of comfortably wearing dentures, you may come to find that they don't fit the way they once did. Advances in surgical procedures and materials now allow oral and maxillofacial surgeons to help the patient without teeth to eat, speak and smile without worrying about slipping or uncomfortable dentures.

Over time, the shape and size of the jawbone changes, beginning when a tooth is lost. These changes can result in dentures that slip and click, and even cause pain. The irritation caused by ill-fitting dentures can produce further changes in the bone or the gum tissues. After years of shrinkage, many patients are left without enough jawbone to support dentures at all.

TREATMENT OPTIONS EXIST

Preservation and restoration of the jawbone begins at the time of extraction of teeth. Bone and soft tissue grafting techniques performed in conjunction with extractions may decrease or prevent bone loss under dentures. Oral and maxillofacial surgeons have developed many procedures for treating the patient without teeth who suffers with the social and physical problems caused by ill-fitting dentures. Your oral and maxillofacial surgeon will explore these options with you before deciding on a treatment plan.

If shrinkage of the jawbone has taken place and some ridge height and width remains, the oral and maxillofacial sur-

geon may use bone or bone substitute to build up the jawbone. Depending on the degree of shrinkage, this treatment sometimes can be completed in the office.

Another treatment option which your oral and maxillofacial surgeon may consider is called a vestibuloplasty. If enough jawbone remains below the muscle attachments of the lip, cheeks and tongue, firm tissue can be grafted over the bone to provide a larger ridge. This usually requires taking tissue from the roof of the mouth or thigh.

After careful evaluation of your problem, the oral and maxillofacial surgeon may decide that implants are necessary to support a denture and restore proper function.

MAINTENANCE IS IMPORTANT

Many people stop going to their dentist after dentures are fitted. Regular check-ups are still the best insurance that your mouth is healthy. Changes in the gums and jawbone can occur under a denture, especially as a result of chronic irritation.

Overgrowth of tissues in some areas, or sores on the gum, is also common. In addition, your dentist or oral and maxillofacial surgeon will sometimes see early warning signs of generalized disease. It is also important to be aware of changes in oral tissue due to cigarette smoking or alcohol consumption so that alterations in these habits can prevent future problems.

Exploring your options with your dentist and oral and maxillofacial surgeon will allow you to function without worrying about your dentures and will preserve the health of your mouth. ●



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P7 (35M/9.99)