

Replacing Missing Teeth - *Fixed Bridgework*

by Scott F. Kenward, DMD

If you're missing one or more teeth, you may be aware of their importance to your appearance and dental health. Your teeth work together for many daily functions from eating to speaking. With missing teeth, it's difficult to do these things. Missing teeth can and should be replaced. *Fixed bridges* are a great way to restore your dental health and appearance.

A bridge - a device used to replace missing teeth - attaches artificial teeth to adjacent natural teeth, called abutment teeth. Fixed bridges are applied by either placing crowns on the abutment teeth or by bonding the artificial teeth directly to the abutment teeth. Fixed bridges can only be removed by a dental professional, offer more stability than their removable counterparts, and feel more natural.

Why do I need a bridge?

Oral functionality and appearance are important reasons for wearing a bridge. A bridge helps support your lips and cheeks. The loss of a back tooth may cause your mouth to sink and your face to look older.

Dental health is the most important reason for a bridge. Teeth were designed to complement each other. Unusual stresses are placed on the gums and other oral tissues when teeth are missing, causing a number of potentially harmful disorders.

Increased risk of gum disease has proven to be one of the worst side effects of missing teeth and can be minimized with a bridge.

Missing teeth can cause speech disorders as they are used to make many of the sounds we use to speak clearly.

How is a bridge attached?

The attachment procedure usually takes several appointments to complete. At the first appointment your dentist will prepare the *abutment* (supporting) teeth on either side of the gap by shaping a portion of the enamel and dentin.

Since the bridge must be fabricated very precisely to ensure correct bite and to match the opposing tooth, impressions of the teeth are taken and sent to a dental laboratory where the bridge will be constructed.

The bridge itself is usually a single, solid restoration, with crowns fitted to the abutments at either end and *pontics* (false teeth) replacing the lost teeth in the middle.

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What materials are used?

Bridges are constructed from gold alloys fused to porcelain, or sometimes from bonded ceramic material.

How do I take care of my bridge?

A strict regimen of brushing and flossing will keep the bridge and surrounding teeth clean. This is of critical importance as the bridge relies on the neighboring teeth for support.

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