



Tooth Talk

“Hey Doc, I can’t eat or talk with my full bottom denture! Can you help me? (Part 1)”

Out of all the treatment modalities in dentistry, complete or full lower dentures probably have the lowest success rate. Many people who have lost their bottom teeth, especially those with their bottom teeth removed a long time ago, and have to relegate to wearing full lower dentures, often complain of their inability to keep the dentures in place for proper eating, chewing and speech. They can’t enjoy their food anymore and it becomes a social embarrassment when their full lower dentures fall out of their mouths during eating or talking at social functions or at family gatherings!

The followings are the main reasons why full bottom dentures do not work:

- Continual bone loss- After teeth are removed, human’s jaw bone will continue to shrink away in height and in width throughout the person’s lifetime. This phenomenon is due to the lack of stimulation to the jaw bone during eating and chewing through the teeth. Unfortunately, the lower jaw bone shrinks away much more rapidly than the upper jaw bone. Some research studies show that lower jaw bone can disappear up to 4X as fast as the upper jaw bone after teeth removal! The lack of lower jaw bone means the lack of suction to support a full bottom denture.
- Presence of the tongue- Human’s tongue is one of the strongest muscles in the body and it can easily push on and dislodge the full bottom denture during eating and speech.
- Limited surface area for denture support- A full upper denture can rely on the roof of the mouth for support and stability. The lower jaw is “U” shaped and it simply lacks the amount of surface area of bone that the upper jaw has for denture support.

There are several options to help patients achieve adequate stability with their full bottom dentures so that they can regain their ability to enjoy food and their self-confidence.

1. Denture reline - As the lower jaw bone shrinks away, a space will develop between the full lower denture and the lower jaw bone. As a result, the denture does not seat tightly on the jaw bone anymore and the denture becomes loose. By having a denture reline, new plastic denture material is added to the bottom of the denture so that the lower denture will again fit tightly on the lower jaw bone. However, if the patient has lost an substantial amount of bone, denture reline will not help much at all as there is still inadequate bone for the lower denture to grip onto.
2. Denture adhesives- There are many types of denture adhesives/glues available over-the-counter that people can purchase to help stabilize their full bottom dentures. Again, just like denture reline, if there is inadequate bone, denture adhesives can only help marginally at best.
3. Dental Implants - For those who have a really tough time keeping their full lower dentures in place, dental implants most likely will be the best solution to their problem. As I have discussed in my previous article, dental implants are pegs/screws made of titanium alloy that are inserted into the lower jaw bone to help stabilize and support the full lower denture. The more implants that the patient chooses to have, the more stable the denture will be, taking into consideration the anatomical boundary for the placement of the implants. After the implants are integrated into the lower jaw bone, “attachments” will be inserted into the bottom of the lower denture. The attachments will allow the lower denture to “snap” onto the heads of the implants for stability and support.

In the next article, I will examine the different types of implant treatment modalities for full lower denture stabilization.

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