

Tooth Talk

“Hey Doc, I like to replace my missing teeth. What are my options? (Part 3- fixed bridges)”

If one wants a permanent solution for replacing his/her missing teeth, especially if only one or two teeth are missing, a fixed bridge may just be the most appropriate choice.

A bridge utilizes the natural teeth on either side or on one side alone as anchors to support the false tooth/teeth. The dentist will prepare the natural teeth, take an impression, and then send the case to the dental laboratory to fabricate the bridge. Once the bridge returns, the dentist will fit it over the prepared teeth and make sure the fit is tight without a gap and the patient's bite is normal with the bridge in the mouth.

If the fit is good, the bite is normal, and the patient is satisfied with the esthetics, then the dentist will cement the bridge over the anchored teeth with a permanent cement. Bridges are traditionally made of porcelain and/or metal. Nowadays, due to advanced technology, bridges can be fabricated out of Zirconium which offers superior strength and esthetics.

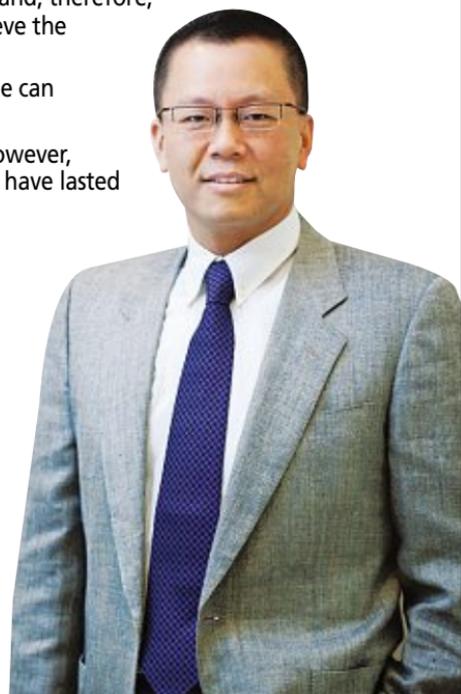
“Advantages” of a fixed bridge include:

- staying in the mouth permanently and patients do not have to remove it on a daily basis
- great esthetics, comfort and function
- feel's like one's own teeth
- patients do not have to worry about the bridge coming loose during speech and function, as compared to the removable denture
- if the supporting teeth have large fillings, the bridge can actually strengthen them and protect them from fracture.
- treatment can be completed in a short period of time - etc.

‘Disadvantages’ of a fixed bridge include:

- it is necessary to grind down 2 natural teeth for 1 missing tooth, especially if the 2 anchored teeth are virgin and are in perfect condition
- it will be more difficult for patients to maintain oral hygiene on the supporting teeth since they are splinted together by the bridge. Patients will have to use a special floss to clean the gap under the bridge and the supporting teeth. Sometimes, patients develop decay or gum disease on the supporting teeth under the bridge due to poor oral hygiene and the existing bridge/anchored teeth have to be removed and be replaced with a new bridge!
- higher cost than removable dentures
- porcelain can chip or break off the bridge, requiring a remake, especially in the esthetic area such as the front of the mouth
- the nerve tissue of the anchored teeth, especially if they have existing large or deep fillings, may be aggravated during the bridge preparation and, therefore, requiring root canal therapy on those teeth to relieve the toothache
- there is a limit on the span of missing teeth a bridge can replace - etc.

On average, bridges last between five to 10 years. However, with proper oral hygiene maintenance, many bridges have lasted a lifetime of the patients!



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