

About False Teeth—Dentures

By John Hackbarth DDS

It is wrong to believe that when someone gets false teeth or dentures, they are through worrying about going to the dentists or spending more money on their mouth. This is not true. False teeth are made of plastic and like anything else, plastic doesn't last forever. They break, crack and get worn over time. Also, it is normal for the boney ridge of the jaws to shrink over time and the dentures no longer fit well.

It is not true that just because you knew someone with false teeth who could eat anything with his dentures, that everyone and anyone could do the same. Nothing could be further from the truth. Everyone comes in different shapes, different personalities, different types of bone, different kinds of chewing habits, etc. Having all your teeth extracted can be compared to the handicap you would have if you had both your legs amputated. Some people seem to get around well with prosthetic legs, and some can strap on those spring-like things and run around a track, but many never get out of their wheelchairs-- and they would all tell you they would rather have their legs back.

It is wrong to think just because you get old, you are going to have to wear false teeth. That is not true. I have many patients in their 70's, 80's and 90's that still have their natural teeth. Why? Because they took care of them and had timely repairs if needed.

It is also a false belief that all dentists are the same, especially when it comes to making an extremely good fitting set of dentures. Dentures are probably the most difficult of all dental services to do well, especially on a consistent basis.

It is true there are individuals with no teeth who can wear just about anything and make it work. They are what dentists call adaptors. There are stories of people using dentures they got from garage sales or funeral homes. I have seen tons of horrible dentures that the patients use and eat anything and everything. If you are an adaptor, you can get by with bad dentures. If you are not an adaptor, your dresser drawers may be full of plates that never worked.

If false teeth are made too small, the following can be observed:

1. The lips become small and thin because they curl under toward the teeth. If you have seen women who constantly have lipstick on their teeth it is because the denture or natural teeth do not support the lower face.
2. The upper lip doesn't seem natural. It's too small and thin and wrinkled.
3. There is a crease between the bottom of the chin and the lower lip.
4. When the person smiles, you cannot see the teeth.

If false teeth are made too big:

1. Way too much teeth show even when not smiling. When smiling, all you see are teeth and gums.
2. Both upper and lower lips protrude.
3. The chin is too far from the nose.
4. You might say that the person has a "piranha look."

If a denture is properly made:

1. It is so natural and beautiful, no one can tell it is a denture.
2. The profile of the face is natural.
3. The lips are full with fewer wrinkles

The basic rules of getting a proper fitting, beautiful denture are:

1. Having enough bone for a denture to sit on. Implants are a wonderful thing for denture wearers, but that is another article.
2. Don't expect it to happen in a day or two. It takes time to make a beautiful, well-fitting denture.
3. The denture is usually made with the assistance of a dental technician. The quality must never be compromised.
4. The bottom line is that a properly fitting denture requires more work, and is more expensive than a cheaply made set of false teeth.
5. The dentist you choose should be experienced and stand behind his/her work.