

Throw Out the Denture Adhesive

By Thomas Jackson, DDS

PHOTO: THOMAS BALSAMO

Over the years, edentulism (missing teeth) has become a major public health problem. In fact, it actually fulfills the World Health Organization (WHO) definition of a physical impairment. Edentulism can be considered a disability because it may limit a person's ability to perform two essential tasks in life: speaking and eating. It can also be considered a handicap because significant changes are needed in order to compensate for these deficiencies. In the past, complete dentures have been the only mechanism to replace missing teeth and have been considered the standard of care.

Over 30 million people in the United States (41 percent of whom are over 65 years old) are edentulous in one or both arches, and they spend over \$6 million a year in denture adhesive products. However, many people experience significant problems coping with dentures, as the chronic shrinking of the jawbone will likely cause a struggle to eat and speak comfortably.

Unfortunately, dentures also require that individuals develop a new chewing pattern that will allow them to eat food and keep their dentures in place. Some people adjust well to these changes, but others do not. The lower denture can be very difficult to keep in place, even with denture adhesives. Upper dentures are kept in the mouth somewhat more easily, but the extensive plastic support base for the denture teeth can have an impact on taste and can cause some people to gag.

Dental implants solve the problem

But here's the good news: dental implants have allowed these patients the ability to have normal function and resume a higher quality of life.

Dental implants can provide a stable foundation for individual replacement of teeth or serve to anchor specially constructed attachable upper and lower dentures. They can be made for easy intentional removal for cleaning or can be more permanently attached in a way that permits a dentist to remove them for cleaning.

Implant-supported replacement teeth allow individuals to eat a wider variety of food than with traditional dentures. Chewing steak and biting into an apple or ear of corn can be done with confidence and without worry that teeth will fall out.

And there's another valuable benefit of implant-supported teeth: implants stimulate your jawbone. This helps prevent progressive bone loss and also the subsequent facial aging that is so often seen in patients who are missing most or all of their teeth.

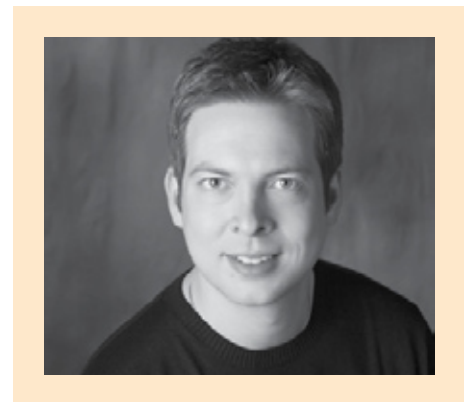
Greater satisfaction with teeth

Patients who have implant-supported replacement teeth report greater satisfaction with teeth that look, feel, and function like their own natural teeth. Depending on how much bone you have left when you seek implant treatment, an implant surgeon can develop a treatment plan with your dentist that will allow the proper number of implants to be placed in order that your bite can be restored to your satisfaction.

If you have been missing your natural teeth for many years, you may benefit from an office procedure to rebuild your jawbone before implant placement. This process is most often completed in an office setting and not in a hospital. Age and most health conditions are not a factor in deciding if implants can be placed.

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The planning for dental implants must involve a restorative dentist and an implant surgeon. Periodontists are dental and implant surgeons who are advanced-trained in the planning and placement of dental implants, and they can help you make the best decision for your life and lifestyle, so that you can have the teeth that make you look and feel your best. U



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