

Mouth Matters

Dorion on Dentistry

When Do Dentures Need To Be Replaced?



Dentures improve the lives for about 1 in 10 adults in Canada. While it's wonderful that we're gradually seeing more and more people keep their teeth for life, largely due to improvements in dentistry and oral hygiene practices in the last half century, for many people the clock can not be turned back and complete dentures are a reality.

Also wonderful is the fact that suffering with loose fitting and unsightly dentures has become a thing of the past due to improved materials and techniques, especially with the advent of dental implants for retention and stability of dentures.

We are often asked how often a denture should be replaced. Both the American and Canadian Dental Associations recommend that dentures be replaced every 5 years. Based on those recommendations, many dental insurance programs also recognize that it's advisable to replace dentures after 5 years

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and will often assist with the cost for fabrication of new ones at the 5 year mark.

Dentures by necessity are fabricated from rigid, non-compliant materials, while your face, mouth

and jaws on the other hand change over time. Because the dentures can't adapt to these changes and because artificial teeth wear down, a denture cannot function as effectively after more than about five to seven years. In addition, studies have shown that dentures begin to retain bacteria and fungi with age as the denture surface becomes increasingly scuffed and dull from normal wear and tear. These changes in the denture's surface texture thus provide numerous microscopic "niches" for disease causing organisms to live.

A worn out denture can result in numerous unhealthy and irreversible side effects. Because these changes come on gradually they may go unnoticed until late in the process. We will look at just a

few or the inevitable side effects of worn dentures.

Decreased efficiency in chewing function can lead to dietary changes that in turn can lead to digestive issues including colon problems. Headaches, earaches, neck pain and TMJ (jaw joint) problems may arise as the bite becomes over closed with time. Overclosure occurs as the teeth wear down and because the jaws and supporting tissue gradually "melt away" when there are no teeth (or implants) to maintain the bone.

In addition to the health issues, esthetic changes also occur as the bone and supporting tissues shrink. Lip and cheek support is lost and a sunken-in appearance of the face will gradually make the aging process much more evident.

Fibrous lumps in the mouth called epulis fissurata occur when the borders of the dentures start to impinge on the soft tissue at the base of the gums. These may have to be surgically removed to facilitate proper fit and comfort of subsequent dentures.

The good news is that frequent replacement of dentures, with or without dental implants, can help to minimize the effects of these changes and promote better function, health and appearance. There are now techniques available to use your existing denture as a "template" for making new ones. We can take the features you liked best from your old dentures as well as make any needed or desired changes.

If your dentures are more than five to seven years old, consider seeing your dentist for a consultation. If they are 10 to 15 years old we believe it's essential that you replace your dentures to avoid some of the inevitable problems that will result. We believe it is also important for denture wearers to see a dentist at least yearly for oral cancer screening. It takes only a few minutes, costs little and could save your life.

Yours for better dental health,

Rae Dorion, DDS

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