

PROBLEM SOLVERS 10 Partial Dentures

Synonyms: bridges, plates, partials

Meta Description: Partial dentures are used by millions of Americans what types are there and are these long-term solutions?

Article headline: What do I need to know about Partial?

Partial dentures are basically dentures that clip on to a few remaining teeth. Full dentures rely on the remaining gum, proper extensions and denture glues to stay in place but partials can clip on to teeth.

What types of partials are there?

Temporary partials; these are made with all plastic and have some bent wires that look like paperclips that will loosely grip on to a few teeth. They are not tight in how they fit and must usually have some adhesive crème or powder to help them stay in place. They may be used as an immediate replacement when teeth are removed and teeth are to be placed the same day. These should not be used for longer than 6-9 months to prevent them from breaking and accelerating bone loss.

Do partials have to have these paper clip wires?

No, dentures can have flexible plastic clasps and some “brands” or types are Valplast, Cusil, or Flexite; flexible partials. These types of partials can be bent and are very flexible in nature so can be hard to break.

If no clasps are used we call these “flippers” as they can be flipped into and out of the mouth easily. They are for looks and shouldn’t be used for chewing as the few teeth on the acrylic saddle can break very easily. These can be a quick and cost effective way to replace a missing tooth while options are considered.

What is the downside to flexible partials?

They can be difficult to repair as this flexible acrylic won’t stick to traditional plastic so if a denture tooth pops off, a new partial may need to be made. Another negative to these partials is that they sit only on the gum tissue so they do not rest on the remaining teeth. That means they can put more pressure on the gum during chewing and may lead to accelerated bone loss under the partial as compared to a traditional partial. The good point to these partials is that they can have clear or tooth colored clasps to avoid the unaesthetic appearance of the metal clasps.

What are the types of partials?

Well, the all acrylic partial was one type and a metal-based partial denture with cast

clasps is the main type of removable partial denture. These have cast rests which sit on top of teeth to take the load off the gum tissue and cast clasps to precisely allow the partial to grip the teeth and remain in place with minimal movement.

Do all partials fit the same way and feel the same?

No, partials are classified according to how many teeth they replace and where those teeth were. If someone is missing all but two teeth, the partial may move up and down with these teeth as a fulcrum-like a teeter tater.

A partial like this will fit much differently (and less comfortably) than a partial that is fully tooth supported. A partial with clasps that has these clasps evenly spread out around the arch which can rest on teeth in all four corners of the mouth won't rock and will resist displacement.

What is the worst type of partial to have to wear?

The least comfortable partial would occur when someone has teeth on one side of their arch and no teeth on the other side. Every time food is chewed, this partial will lift up on the side where there are no clasps and food will get under the partial, which is very uncomfortable for the patient that has this situation.

How long do partials last? They last 3-5 years and then the acrylic teeth will wear out and need to be replaced. The denture base will also get looser and more sores will appear which are signs that a new partial is needed.

What should I know about to help me be successful with partials?

Ask your dentist how you can place implants so that you have more devices for the partial to clip on to and prevent rocking, sores and food impaction.

As well, if you can afford to replace all the missing teeth with implants, the partial can be placed in a drawer forever. The implants will prevent loosening of the teeth that the partial was clasping on to which is a main reason that partial dentures fail.

In my practice I teach patients about bone sparing dentistry. Partial denture wear for too long leads to bone loss so partials should be replaced as soon as it is financially and physically a viable option. A removable partial denture survival is 60% at 4 years, which means that 4 out of 10 are broken at 4 years.

Teeth that are clasped on to by partials need repairs at a rate of 80% at 10 years .

That means that the bending and forces on these teeth cause fillings to pop out and teeth to chip or crack leading to the need for more repairs. Teeth that partials clip on to also have with accelerated bone loss because the clasps move these teeth during chewing so they lose bone around these areas.

Half of people interviewed report that they chew better without their partials in their mouths!

Only 60% of people with a lower free-end saddle partial (missing all teeth on one side) are still wearing them after 4 years. Some studies show that 44% of teeth that partials clip on to are lost within 10 years when wearing removable partials.

So while partials are a necessary evil to prevent teeth from moving, shifting and super-erupting into spaces, whenever possible, they should be replaced with fixed dentistry according to the literature and patient reports.

Wearing a partial for too long and not having it refitted can lead to bone loss and can make it very difficult to add bone later and have dental implants so it is important to have discussions about the quality and quantity of your bone before and during your wearing partial dentures.

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