

Problem Solvers 11 Gagging and other denture problems

Synonym-Denture intolerance, embarrassed to smile, ill-fitting dentures

In the United States over 30 million people wear dentures.

Many people that receive dentures cannot wear them due to denture intolerance. This article will give you some options to help you wear and get acclimated to your new teeth.

Denture Sufferers can solve some of their problems if they understand what is causing them. The first thing that people need to realize is that dentures are not teeth.

They don't chew the way teeth chew; they move when biting forces are placed upon them. Many people feel that they should be able to do anything and eat anything with dentures and unfortunately, that is simply not true. When people understand the limitations of dentures they can begin learning how to use them and if desired, how to rebuild their lost bone to supplement their chewing with the addition of dental implants. When people have all of their natural teeth they can generate 250-lbs/square inch of biting force to chew a raw carrot. People that have been wearing dentures for 4-5 years may have biting forces of 25 lbs/square inch or eating over cooked carrots. This is because as our teeth are now gone, there is no longer a connection with our brain that tells it how hard you are chewing. The longer the teeth are gone, the harder it is to generate high biting forces with plastic plates that are sitting on your gums. Using dental implants as discussed later will reestablish this neurological connection between the brain and biting forces, allowing implant over denture wearers to come back to almost the same forces they had when they had all of their teeth.

Dentures are made in a series of appointments from taking impressions to bite registrations where measurements are taken to learn where to place the teeth. After these appointments the dentures are delivered, adjusted and patients are instructed to come in for post-operative adjustments. In my practice we tell our denture patients that the day they get their dentures they are only half done! That highlights the need for adjustments to the denture acrylic and teeth so they can be customized and idealized for the patient.

Could my bite be causing my "gagging" problem? Yes if teeth hit and cause the denture to be driven back into the soft palate, it can cause a gagging sensation. Adjustment of the bite can help eliminate this feeling.

My upper dentures feel good but my lowers constantly hurt-why?

Upper dentures rest on the palate or upper jaw. Upper jaws or maxillas are a bigger

bony area and have larger surface area so they have more for the upper denture to grip on to. Upper dentures are usually the easier of the two prostheses to get used to.

The upper jaw is attached to the skull so it doesn't move. The lower jaw or mandible is on a hinge and it moves. When chewing, for example, the lower jaw moves up and down while masticating your food. The tongue moves and the lower denture looks like a horseshoe to go around the tongue. So every time the tongue moves, the denture moves. The lower denture sits on a smaller bone and the muscles under the tongue move so when a patient yawns, swallows, sneezes, these muscles all move and work to dislodge the lower denture.

My lower jaw aches with my new dentures, why?

Another complication of lower dentures is the pattern of bone loss. When lower jaws atrophy, the remaining bone erodes inward and downward and makes the remaining bone sharp and thin so the lower dentures become progressively more painful. This makes it harder to make lower dentures comfortable, the longer the bone loss occurs. To make matters worse, as a patient wears their dentures the bone wears away and in the lower jaw the nerves can get exposed which can cause "zingers" or shocks, or nerve pain. The upper jaw doesn't have the same nerves that hurt with prolonged denture use. Lastly, lower dentures can move up to ¼ inch with every chewing cycle which can lead to sores, pain and accelerated bone loss.

What can I do to make my lower denture more comfortable?

Ask your dentist if you could get a soft silicone liner in your lower denture. This liner acts like a cushion and can often grip undercuts in the bone that a hard denture base cannot grip as it would hurt.

Can my dentist do something to help me today with my pain?

Yes they can do temporary soft liners or tissue conditioner treatments to help your gums rest. It's like putting a band-aid in your denture as it will take all the pressure off your teeth until another solution can be addressed.

What can I do about my denture that gags me? The back of the denture where the soft palate attaches to the hard palate is very sensitive and can cause a gagging if the hard acrylic rests on the movable soft palate. The dentist can adjust this area until the soft palate isn't irritated.

My dentist has adjusted it several times and I still gag what can be done?
Have them adjust it until you don't gag. Sometimes dentists think that a patient will just "get used to it". But for some the gag reflex is so strong that tremendous denture acrylic must be removed so the patient can wear the denture. While this may not be the way we were instructed to adjust dentures in dental school-we must adjust them until our patients can wear them!

My denture moves a lot and I use a lot of denture glue to hold it in, is this normal?
While denture adhesive is recommended a denture that moves excessively should be relined or remade.

How long should my denture last?
Dentures should be relined (fresh coating of acrylic so it fits tighter) or remade every 3-5 years. Wearing dentures longer than recommended will not cause physical pain but will accelerate denture tooth wear, and bone loss.

What happens if I wear my dentures too long?
When denture teeth wear out, a person's nose and chin get closer together which will lead to bigger wrinkles and a more difficult time constructing the next set of teeth. When the denture tooth goes away, forces from chewing cause spreading on the denture acrylic and will lead to denture teeth popping off and fractures through the denture base.

Can I superglue my teeth back on to my denture?
No-using superglue ruins the acrylic and makes the repair more costly and at times renders the denture non-reparable.

What about those denture pads?
Use of adhesive pads may serve a person temporarily but is an indicator that the denture needs to be remade or relined. Using a pad will push the denture up on the skin, change the person's bite and make it move even more with chewing. This can lead to further bone loss and will lead to chewing forces that the dentist did not plan, leading to rocking, tipping, sores, pain and bone loss.

Use of adhesives in general can help to create an oxygen free zone and can help make the denture move less. So small amounts of adhesive can be a wonderful adjunct for denture wearers.

My denture can't be worn. I feel they look like horse teeth, what can I do?
Bring in photos of when you had your teeth, regardless of your age, to help the dentist construct a smile you are more familiar with.

I want to eventually get rid of my dentures how many implants would I need to get

rid of the upper and lower plate?

While some dentists use an (all on four implant) philosophy, my training requires a minimum of 6 implants in the upper and lower arch to make a palate-free maxillary denture or upper and lower fixed bridges.

If a full arch of teeth is 14 teeth, using 6 implants is the minimum number I would use to place a palate free denture. It is always better to over-engineer a reconstruction so that if an implant fails, it doesn't necessarily mean the entire prosthesis will fail.

What can I do to prevent these denture sores? See the dentist twice a year for a professional denture cleaning, oral cancer examination and an occlusal evaluation to check your bite and insure your dentures are in good condition. It is also a great idea to have two sets of dentures so that if a denture tooth pops off or the acrylic breaks, you never need to be without your teeth! These are called spare dentures or embarrassment dentures and can be a very worthwhile investment.

How should I clean my dentures?

Using washcloths dipped in Listerine or a mouthrinse of your choice can help by scrubbing the gum tissues to keep them clean, bacteria and yeast free and help toughen up the tissues. The dentures should be scrubbed with a denture brush and denture cleaner and then soaked in a denture bath to further eliminate germs that can cause bad breath and lead to accumulation of debris on your dentures.

It is a good idea for a dentist to use soft tissue conditioners prior to making a new denture to insure the gums are at rest, there are no sores, and they aren't duplicating the fit of your new dentures, to traumatized or sore gums.

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