

Spaces in the dentition- Partial Dentures

Spaces can be left in the mouth where a single tooth or a number of teeth have been lost. These gaps can be filled for the sake of your appearance and also to prevent extra strain being put on the teeth either side of the lost tooth. A gap being left can also affect the way your teeth bite together as the teeth either side can begin to lean into the space left by the missing tooth. This can also lead to food packing and ultimately this causes both tooth decay and gum disease. A gap where a tooth has been lost can also lead to long term jaw joint problems.

There are several different ways that a gap can be filled. The first is a removable false tooth or teeth on a denture. This is known as a partial denture. The second is with a fixed bridge. A bridge is usually used where there are fewer teeth to replace.

Partial Dentures

This is a plate with a number of false teeth on it. It may be all plastic or metal and plastic. Both types may have clips (clasps), which fit around the natural teeth. Sometimes these clips may show when you smile or open your mouth.

The teeth on the denture are usually made of plastic, very occasionally porcelain. The teeth are chosen to match the shape, size and colour of your natural teeth.

Plastic partial dentures are less expensive to make than bridges. But even when they are designed very carefully, they can damage the teeth they fit against.

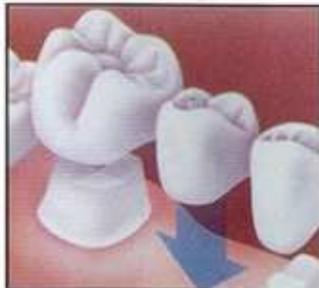
Metal partial dentures are usually made from an alloy of cobalt and chromium and they are much stronger. They are lighter to wear and can be supported by the remaining teeth. Although the base is metal, they have gum-coloured plastic and natural looking teeth. They are more expensive than plastic dentures but if well fitting are better for your long term dental health.

Your dental surgeon will guide you as to which is the best choice for you. Usually the metal-based denture gives the best result.

All types of dentures should be removed for cleaning. You will be shown how to care for your denture by your dental surgeon when it is fitted. Dentures should always be removed before you go to bed, unless you are advised otherwise by your dentist.

Fixed Bridges

Bridges provide a way of filling a gap left by missing teeth, without the need for a removal denture. Naturally this offers a more acceptable solution socially.



Bridges are usually made of a precious metal alloy covered in a tooth-coloured porcelain. A bridge is in essence a number of crowns fused together.

Although a bridge may sometimes seem expensive, it will usually last for many years. It will improve your appearance and the way your teeth bite together. Constructing a bridge uses the considerable skill of the dental surgeon and dental technician.

It is very important that you take special care to clean your bridge. You will have to clean under the false area of your bridge everyday using special floss; your dental surgeon will advise you how to do this when your bridge is fitted.

There are other treatments that can be used to replace missing teeth; these include attachments for dentures and dental implants.

(For more information on these, please see our leaflet Dental Implants).