

# Filling In

## What are dentures?

A denture is a removable replacement for missing teeth and the tissues connected to those teeth. It is made of acrylic plastic and sometimes porcelain and metal materials. A denture closely resembles natural gum tissue and teeth. Complete dentures replace all of the teeth, while partial dentures fill in the spaces created by missing teeth and prevent other teeth from shifting position. Complete dentures are “immediate” or “conventional.” An immediate denture is a complete denture or partial denture that is inserted on the same day, immediately following the removal of the natural teeth. The immediate denture acts as a Band-Aid to protect the tissues and reduce bleeding after tooth extraction. The conventional denture is ready for placement in the mouth about 8 to 12 weeks after the teeth have been removed and the gum tissue has healed. However, some dentists may recommend more time before placing a conventional denture.

## Who needs dentures?

A partial denture is for people who still have some of their natural teeth. Dentures are not just for elderly patients. Patients of any age may lose some or all of their teeth and may require a denture of some sort. Because teeth are a permanent part of the body, tooth loss can have an emotional impact on some people. It is important to talk to your dentist about any fears, anxiety, or other emotions you are feeling about tooth loss.

## How do you get dentures?

The denture process lasts about one month. Typically, five or more appointments are needed to complete the process. The process includes the initial



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diagnosis; the making of an impression and wax bite to determine the dimensions and proper jaw position; a “try-in” to ensure proper color, shape, and fit; placement of the final denture; and any minor adjustments.

## How do dentures feel?

Dentures may feel awkward and loose at first because your cheek and tongue muscles must learn to keep them in place. Speech also may be temporarily, but mildly, affected. There also may be some minor irritation or soreness. Saliva flow may increase for a short time. As your mouth becomes accustomed to the dentures, however, these problems subside.

## How long should I wear my dentures?

If your dentures are removable, your

dentist will provide instructions about how long you should wear them. After the initial adjustment period, your dentist may tell you to remove the dentures before you go to sleep. Research has shown that removing the dentures for at least eight hours during the day or night allows the gums to rest and permits normal stimulation and cleaning of the mouth by the tongue and saliva. This removal promotes better long-term health of the gums.

## How do I care for my dentures?

- Denture adhesives may be recommended, especially for the first-time denture wearer. Adhesives may improve the retention and stability of dentures for those with minimal bone support or small ridges. Stability of the denture will help the wearer's confidence.
- Remove and brush the denture daily with a denture cleanser and a brush (one specifically designed for cleaning dentures or a soft toothbrush).
- Avoid using boiling water to sterilize the denture, because hot water can cause the denture to lose its shape.
- If you wear a partial denture, remove it before brushing your natural teeth.
- When you're not wearing the denture, soak it in denture cleanser or water.
- To avoid misplacing your denture, store it in the same place after removal.

## Are there alternatives to dentures?

Dental implants are a possible alternative to dentures. Implants are artificial tooth roots that are surgically anchored into your jaw to hold a replacement tooth or bridge in place. Implants and bridges may resemble the “feel” of real teeth, but they may be more expensive than dentures. Not all patients are good candidates for implants, so be sure to talk to your dentist about which treatment option is best for you.

## Resources

[www.agd.org](http://www.agd.org)

At the AGD's Web site, you can search more than 300 oral health topics, post a dental question, sign up for e-newsletters, find an AGD dentist, and more.

1.877.2X.A.YEAR

AGD's toll-free referral number. Call to locate an AGD member dentist in your area.