

## **Bridge the Gap**

In the dental world, bridges refer to replacement teeth that take the place of missing teeth. Specifically, these structures fill in the space where the missing teeth once resided. Bridges aid in keeping the original shape of your face, as well as protect your teeth from shifting.

## **Qualifications**

Missing teeth can actually cause a lot of damage to a person's mouth. In the perfect mouth, the teeth are evenly spaced and structured to hold the other teeth in place. Without one of your teeth, you may get a drifter. A tooth may begin to gravitate toward the empty space. Across the mouth, from the empty space, you may find that your jaw moves up or down in relation to the empty space. As time goes on, this will definitely affect your bite, as well as your jaw and the remaining teeth. More stress will be put on those teeth and joints, resulting in pain.

Additionally, you can expect to experience more decay. Shifted teeth and movement can make it harder for you to get to the now crowded or displaced areas. This elevates your chances of periodontal disease, as well as tooth decay.

The last area of concern that would qualify you for a bridge stems from your bone shrinking. When you have a missing tooth, your bone actually shrinks to compensate for the newly formed gap. This affects your outward physical appearance. It changes the structure of your lips and cheeks, because the jawbone is lacking in support. As this continues, your appearance will look older.

## **Tooth Replacement**

Planning and carrying out a bridge requires time and several appointments. Once you and your dentist are in agreement that a bridge is best, your dentist will schedule you to return. She will prep the teeth on either side of the missing tooth. These two teeth will act as posts to hold the bridge in place.

Next, your dentist will make an impression of the two teeth, as well as the missing gap. This part is very important for the laboratory. Special technicians will construct the bridge. They need a good impression to do so. Just like a crown prep, your dentist will make you a temporary bridge that fits over those prepped teeth. This is important, because the nerves are still live in your teeth and you may experience more sensitivity if you do not have something sheltering those teeth. You will wear your temporary until the lab finishes making your bridge.

Once the permanent bridge arrives, your dentist will fit it to your mouth, as well as make any necessary adjustments. After you two are in agreement that you have a good and comfortable fit that feels natural, the dentist will permanently cement the bridge down to your teeth. This bridge will remain in your mouth and will not be

removable to take in and out. Of course, in the event it needs to come out, a dentist can assist in removing the bridge.

### **Implants Vs. Bridges**

Dental implants are always an option. Sometimes dentists will utilize an implant in conjunction with a bridge, if several teeth are missing.

Implants are a bit of a longer process. Some people need a bone graft to strengthen the jawbone, so that it accepts the surgical post when placed. The post is set up surgically into the jawbone. From there, it must heal. Once it heals, the crown is placed over it.

Benefits of implants include that they do not need support from surrounding teeth and the life expectancy of an implant far outweighs that of a bridge (sometimes prone to break after a number of years).

Many offices offer same day implants, but most require many treatments and several appointments.

You are a good candidate for implants if you have missing teeth, as well as if you are in good health. You also must have enough bone to support the actual implant.

### **Materials Utilized to Construct a Bridge**

Just like crowns, bridges are constructed from the following materials: porcelain ceramic and metal. Based on the location of your crown, as well as the size of the space of the missing tooth and the shade of your teeth, the dentist will advise on the best combination of materials to make your bridge.

### **Taking Care of Your Bridge**

The most important thing in caring for your bridge is protecting the supporting teeth that act as posts. If these teeth become infected from lack of oral hygiene or gum disease takes over, the jawbone can become compromised and the bridge will fail. Consequently, it becomes crucial that you care for your teeth.

**Keep brushing**—Twice a day is the recommended amount, but in between meals never hurts anyone. This brushing should be at least two minutes at a time. Also, use fluoride toothpaste at least twice a week. An electric toothbrush is a great investment.

**Floss**—Flossing can solve so many problems and help in fighting plaque build up in between your teeth and your gums.

**Check-Up's**—Attend your routine dental exams every six months or closer. This will help your dentist to check progress and keep any worry areas on her radar.

**Healthy Eating**—Avoid sugary, sticky, hard candies and foods that could potentially break your bridge or harm your teeth. Stick to healthy, colorful vegetables and fruits, as well as lean meats. Chicken, fish, and tofu are great substitutes for red meat.

If you follow these steps, there is no guarantee everything will work out perfectly. However, you greatly reduce the risks of losing your bridge, as well as any other teeth.