

Removable Partial Dentures

A partial denture is useful for a person missing some teeth, but still having a number of natural teeth.

This device is also called a removable prosthesis, and is a means by which artificial replacement teeth are held in the mouth. The prosthesis is commonly kept in place by means of clasps. These are thin finger-like structures, usually made of a special resilient metal alloy or sometimes plastic, that rest upon and wrap around some remaining natural teeth. Clasps keep the prosthesis securely in place but still allow a person to easily take it out for regular cleaning and proper brushing of remaining natural teeth.

Some reasons for having a partial denture made

- Replace missing teeth
- Improve ability to chew more naturally
- Chew food with confidence
- Make it possible to eat certain favorite foods
- Maintain a healthier and socially acceptable mouth
- Aids in the preservation of remaining natural teeth
- Help prevent or treat problems of the TMJ (the jaw joint)
- Often improve speech
- Helps develop a more pleasing and confident smile
- Support the face - - often with a more youthful appearance
- Enhance self esteem
- An economical way to replace missing teeth
- Many times an additional tooth may be added to an existing partial denture if a natural tooth is lost
- In most cases crowning teeth is not necessary to fit a partial denture
- Partial dentures are usually easy to repair if they are broken



Esthetics and the conventional partial denture

Generally, clasp design is reasonably esthetic, and often it is possible for them not to be seen. However, depending upon partial denture design, which is based on mouth conditions, there may be some show of clasps. Often this is not an appearance problem. However, if avoiding an unacceptable show of clasps would compromise optimal partial denture design, various special attachments may sometimes be employed to do away with conventional clasps. These attachments are more technically complex and often are referred to as precision or semi-precision attachments.

How long will a partial denture last?

Accidents happen, and the mouth is constantly changing. Partial dentures may no longer fit properly, can break or bend or simply wear out. In fact there is nothing made for the mouth that is permanent. Fractured clasps and so forth may often be repaired.

On average, a partial denture may be expected to last about five years. Depending upon circumstances, a certain removable prosthesis can last a shorter or longer time.

How often should a partial denture be checked?

It is best to have a partial denture, as well as the rest of the mouth, checked at six-month intervals. If left uncorrected, small problems can develop into major ones that could cause disease, loss of teeth or necessitate premature prosthesis replacement.

Partial dentures need to be relined

The jaw ridge a partial denture rests upon is constantly changing. It is normal and necessary to regularly modify how a partial contacts the ridge. This maintenance correction is called relining and on average needs to be performed annually for optimum function. However, this is dependent upon how an individual's mouth changes. A licensed dental professional can best advise when a reline is needed, and when a reline will no longer adequately restore proper function.

Precision And Semi-Precision Partial Dentures

(Avoiding Conventional Partial Denture Clasps)

Precision and semi-precision partial dentures, like conventional partial dentures, replace missing natural teeth with artificial teeth. However, the means by which they are retained in the mouth is different than a conventional clasp prosthesis. To better understand these partial denture types, it is best to first review the basics of conventional partial denture clasps.

How conventional partial denture clasps function

Most partial dentures are usually kept in place by clasps. These are thin finger-like projections of special resilient metal alloy, or, in certain cases, plastic or plastic-like.

Clasps rest on and around certain remaining natural teeth so that their ends extend into undercut areas below a gentle bulge on the tooth. Sometimes it is necessary to shape a tooth or make a crown for a tooth or teeth in order to develop the right amount and relationship of undercut and bulge for retention.

When a partial denture is placed in the mouth, clasps gently spring over a tooth bulge and rest in a relaxed state within an undercut.

A partial denture is held in place during normal eating, speaking and other activities because clasps resist springing back over tooth bulges.

Clasp resistance to removal is not great enough to prevent a person from comfortably removing their partial denture whenever they choose.

The problem with conventional clasps

Despite numerous successful conventional clasp designs, they do have some drawbacks.

- Clasps may at times become visible. Often this is unavoidable and usually is not objectionable. However, for some individuals the show of clasps is simply not acceptable because of personal circumstances and compromised appearance.
- Certain partial dentures may function better with retentive means other than conventional clasps.
- Remaining natural tooth structures may be inadequate to accommodate conventional clasps. Therefore a crown or crowns may need to be fabricated to correct these deficiencies.

Semi-precision and precision partial dentures - - viable alternatives

Alternatives to conventional clasp partial dentures fall into two categories, both of which have no clasps to show.

Semi-precision partial dentures are retained in the mouth by means of mechanical interlocking components. A specially shaped extension of the partial denture fits into or on to a complementary receiving area or projection of a natural tooth that has been crowned. The components fit snugly and consist of a semi-rigid metal to other surface interface, which may also be metal or some other resilient material such as nylon.

Semi-precision partial dentures are retained in the mouth by means of mechanical interlocking components. A specially shaped extension of the partial denture fits into or on to a complementary receiving area or projection of a natural tooth that has been crowned. The components fit snugly and consist of a semi-rigid metal to other surface interface, which may also be metal or some other resilient material such as nylon.

Precision partial dentures are similar to the semi-precision type except that the mechanical interlocking components are manufactured to extremely high tolerances and are held together by precise alignment and a rigid metal to metal frictional interface of components.

Advantages of semi-precision and precision partial dentures

- A cosmetically enhanced partial denture as compared to conventional partial dentures
- No show of metal clasps
- Blends in with the conformity of remaining natural teeth
- Functions with a more even pressure on remaining natural teeth than conventional partial dentures

Disadvantages of semi-precision and precision partial dentures

- More costly to fabricate
- Usually some natural teeth need to be crowned
- More difficult to fabricate and adjust
- Some components may need periodic replacement

Which type of partial denture is best?

Every patient has unique oral health needs that are best determined by a licensed dental professional after a thorough examination.