Dentures – information for patients

What is a denture?
People wear dentures to replace lost or missing teeth so they can enjoy a healthy diet and smile with confidence. Dentures are made of either acrylic (plastic) or metal.

A ‘full' denture is one which replaces all the natural teeth in either the upper or lower jaw.

A ‘partial' denture fills in the spaces left by lost or missing teeth. It may be fastened to your natural teeth with metal clasps or ‘precision attachments'.

Alternatives
Bridges and dental implants may be other options to consider. Your dentist will be able to offer advice on these.

Why should you wear dentures?
Full dentures, to replace all your own teeth, fit snugly over your gums. They will help you to eat comfortably and speak clearly, and will improve your confidence and self- esteem.

If you have gaps between your own teeth, then your other teeth may move to take up some of the space, so you could end up with crooked or tilted teeth. This could affect the way you bite and could damage your other teeth. Partial dentures can help to prevent this from happening, and enable you to eat properly and smile with confidence.

How soon can you have a denture after teeth are removed?
Usually dentures can be fitted straight after your teeth have been removed. These are called ‘immediate dentures'. You will need to visit the dental team beforehand for them to take measurements and impressions of your mouth. However, bone and gums can shrink over time, especially during the first six months after your teeth have been taken out. If your gums shrink, your immediate dentures may need relining, adjusting or even replacing. Your dental team will be able to talk to you about this.

Sometimes your dental team may advise you to wait until your gums are healed before having your dentures, as this can sometimes mean a better fit. Healing may take several months.

Will dentures make you look different?
Replacing lost or missing teeth is very good for your health and appearance. A complete or full denture replaces your natural teeth and gives support to your cheeks and lips. Without this support, sagging facial muscles can make a person look older and they will find it harder to eat and speak properly.

Dentures can be made to closely match your natural teeth so that your appearance hardly changes. Modern dentures may even improve the look of your smile and help to fill out the appearance of your face.

Will you be able to eat with dentures?
Eating will take a little practice. Start with soft foods cut into small pieces. Chew slowly, using both sides of your mouth at the same time to stop the denture moving. As you become more used to your denture, add other foods until you get back to your normal healthy diet.

Will dentures change how you speak?
Pronouncing certain words may take practice. Reading out loud and repeating difficult words will help. Or try singing!

If you find that your dentures occasionally slip when you laugh, cough or smile, reposition them by gently biting down and swallowing. If this happens a lot, see your dentist.

How is my denture made, and how long does it take?
Your dentist will take measurements and impressions of your mouth, then order your dentures from a dental technician.

There may be several appointments needed as the dentist and technician need to make sure the measurements are accurate and that you are going to be happy with how the dentures look before they are fitted.

Stage 1 – initial impressions of your mouth, both upper and lower jaws, so the technician can see how your teeth/jaws sit together. The technician will cast models of your jaws, and may make a special impression tray custom-fitted to your mouth in order to get a more accurate impression of where the denture needs to fit.

Stage 2 – second, more accurate impression and bite registration. The dentist will use wax to record how you bite together and record measurements for the laboratory so they can make sure your face sits correctly when the dentures are in. The technician will use these to make a mock up, in wax, of what the denture will look like.

Stage 3 – the dentist will try the wax denture in your mouth. It will not fit perfectly at this stage but will highlight any particular areas that need adjusting. This is also your opportunity to see if you are happy with how they look. You will look at the shape, positioning and shade of the teeth and let the dentist know what you like or don't like. The technician will use the wax denture and any final instructions from your dentist to make the finished product.

This stage may be repeated if a lot of changes are requested, to make sure everything is right before going to the final stage.

Stage 4 – your denture(s) will be ready at this appointment. Your dentist will put them in for you and check how you are biting together. Adjustments may be made if there are any uncomfortable spots.

How long should you keep your dentures in for?

During the first few days, your dental team may advise you to wear them for most of the time, including while you are asleep. After your mouth gets used to your dentures, your dental team may advise you to take them out before going to bed.

This allows your gums to rest and helps keep your mouth healthy. When you remove your dentures at night, it is best to store them in a small amount of water to stop them warping.

Are upper and lower dentures the same?

The upper denture usually has much more suction to hold it in place. There is much less gum support in the lower jaw, so the lower denture may feel more wobbly because it has to be balanced between your cheeks and your tongue.

After a little while you will learn the shape of your new denture and how to keep it in place, even when you open your mouth wide.

Will you need fixative?
Dentures are custom made to fit your mouth and you shouldn't need a denture fixative. However, some people prefer to use a fixative to give them extra confidence or if their dentures start to become loose before they have

them replaced. A poorly fitting denture may cause irritation and sores. This can often happen if you have worn ‘immediate' dentures for some time.

How long will your dentures last?
If you treat your dentures well, they should last several years. However, your dentures will need to be relined or re-made because of normal wear, or a change in the shape of your mouth. Bone and gum ridges can shrink, causing

your jaws to meet differently. Loose dentures can cause discomfort, and health problems including sores and infections. A loose or badly fitting denture can also make eating and talking more difficult. It is important to replace worn or badly fitting dentures before they cause problems.

How to look after your dentures
Dentures may break if you drop them. Always clean your dentures over a bowl of water or a folded towel in case you drop them.

To clean your denture, the general rule is: brush, soak and brush again. Brush your dentures before soaking them, to help remove any bits of food. Using an effervescent (fizzy) denture cleaner will help remove stubborn stains and leave your denture feeling fresher - always follow the manufacturer's instructions. Then brush the dentures again, as you would your own teeth. Be careful not to scrub too hard as this may cause grooves in the surface.
Most dentists advise using soap and a small- to medium-headed toothbrush. Avoid using toothpaste as this can be abrasive. Make sure you clean all the surfaces of the dentures, including the surface which fits against your gums. This is especially important if you use any kind of denture fixative.

If you notice a build-up of stains or scale, have your denture cleaned by your dental team.

How to look after the rest of your mouth
Any remaining teeth can still be affected by dental decay so it is important to keep them clean and have them inspected regularly by your dentist. It is your responsibility to seek advice from the dentist should you experience any problems.

Even with full dentures, you still need to take good care of your mouth. Every morning and evening, brush your gums, tongue and the roof of your mouth with a soft brush. This removes plaque and helps the blood

If you wear partial dentures, it is even more important that you brush your teeth thoroughly every day. This will help stop tooth decay and gum disease that can lead to you losing more of your teeth. Your dentist may refer you to the hygienist to have your remaining natural teeth cleaned regularly.

How often should I see my dentist?
Regular dental check-ups and having your teeth professionally cleaned are very important for keeping your teeth and gums healthy. Regular visits allow your dental team to check the soft parts of your mouth, including your tongue and cheeks. These examinations are important so that the dental team can spot any infections, mouth conditions or even mouth cancer at the earliest stages. If you have a full denture, check with your dental team about how often you should visit.

With regular professional care, a positive attitude and persistence, you can become one of the millions of people who wear their dentures with a smile!

By undergoing the treatment, you accept the risks mentioned above.