

Developed in collaboration with the Denturist Association of Ontario



# Dentures and Oral Health

Dentures enhance a person's appearance and quality of life. They give people the ability to eat, communicate and smile with confidence. Denture care is essential for maintaining a healthy mouth and prolonging the life of the dentures. It is important to have dentures checked regularly by a dental professional to make sure they fit and function properly. ODHA recommends that dentures be labelled to prevent loss.

Denturists are responsible for the design, fabrication and insertion of dentures. Dental hygienists check for any changes in the fit of the dentures, full or partial, and provide oral care to prevent periodontal (gum) disease and tooth decay. Both professions work together to promote good oral health for overall wellness.

## DENTURE TYPES AND CONDITIONS

There are two types of dentures:

- Full dentures replace all missing teeth.
- Partial dentures replace specific missing teeth.

Some individuals might need time to adjust to their new dentures.

- At first, dentures may feel bulky and uncomfortable, and eating and speaking may be awkward. This often improves with practise.
- It is common to have an initial feeling of increased saliva and not enough space for the tongue. These sensations generally pass as the mouth adjusts to the dentures.
- Some dentures may cause soreness and irritation of gums, cheeks or tongue. If this persists, consult a dental professional.

## SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Denture wearers should consult a dental professional if they experience the following:

- Stains on dentures
- Bad breath (halitosis)
- Toothache
- Plaque (tartar) buildup
- Receding gums
- Oral infections



- Pain, bleeding and/or irritation
- Difficulty eating or speaking
- Loose, abscessed or changes to dental implants
- Damage to dentures
- Dependence on denture adhesive

## TREATMENT AND PREVENTION

For those wearing full or partial dentures, it is important to have regular dental hygiene checkups – including oral cancer screening – and professional cleanings to remove plaque (white, sticky substance) and tartar buildup that accumulate on natural teeth, dentures and implants, especially around the gum line.

### Dental hygienists also:

- Develop customized home-care programs and recommend products to keep dentures clean and the mouth healthy.
- Instruct clients on the proper way to brush and maintain dentures.
- Assess any changes in the oral tissue caused by changes in the fit, comfort and chewing efficiency of the dentures.
- Refer clients to a denturist if dentures indicate a need for
  - adjustments due to normal wear and tear
  - relining if they become loose due to bone shrinkage
  - correcting to eliminate irritation and pain
  - replacement to improve fit and give facial muscles more support

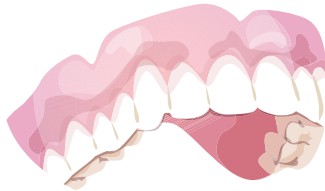
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### **During regular appointments, dental hygienists:**

- Review health history and medications.
- Examine the head, neck and mouth including teeth, gums and tongue.
- Provide oral cancer screening to detect anything unusual, such as a sore or lesion that may indicate early stages of oral cancer.
- Educate clients on disease prevention, e.g., candida (thrush) and the link between oral health and overall health.
- Offer advice on healthy eating, including nutritional snacks and beverages.
- Refer clients to other health-care professionals, when appropriate.

## **THE IMPACT ON ORAL HEALTH**

Most people don't connect their mouths to the rest of their bodies. There is growing evidence linking periodontal disease to other diseases in the body. Bacteria from oral infections can travel through the blood stream, increasing the risk for serious health conditions such as heart disease, stroke and respiratory disorders. Gum disease may also worsen existing diabetes.



Dental hygienists help control the bacteria that cause gum disease and tooth decay. In so doing, they make an important contribution to a person's overall health.

## **DENTURE CARE**

Proper care of dentures can extend their usable life and contribute to a healthy mouth. Even with proper maintenance, the average life span of dentures is five to seven years. Dentures may need to be adjusted or replaced as the mouth changes with age.

- Brush dentures after meals to remove food debris, stains and dental plaque using a soft-bristled denture brush and denture paste or warm water and mild soap.
- When removing, cleaning or inserting dentures at the sink or over the counter, cover the surface with a towel or dish of water. This will help to prevent breakage if the denture is dropped.
- Do not use toothpaste or abrasive cleansers that can scratch and damage the dentures.

- Denture cleansers may be toxic and should not be gargled or swallowed.
- Brush gums, tongue and roof of the mouth daily before inserting dentures. This helps to remove plaque and improve blood circulation for a healthy mouth.
- Remove dentures while sleeping to allow gums to rest.
- When not wearing dentures, soak them in water or a denture cleaning solution to prevent them from drying out.
- After any soaking, rinse dentures in warm water; hot water will warp dentures.
- Do not try to repair a denture or adjust the wire clasps yourself. This could cause further damage to the mouth and the denture and result in added cost for repair or replacement.
  - To prevent damage, keep dentures away from children and pets.
  - Do not wrap dentures in paper products, as they may be thrown out accidentally.
  - Consult a dental professional if dentures become loose, chipped, cracked, broken or cause irritation.

## **MAINTAINING GOOD ORAL CARE**

Between dental hygiene appointments, it is important to maintain good oral care to prevent periodontal disease and decay of remaining teeth.

- Brush twice a day for two minutes using a soft toothbrush and fluoridated toothpaste.
- Clean or floss between teeth and gums once a day to remove food and plaque.
- Clean or scrape the tongue daily.
- Use a mouth rinse, if recommended by a dental professional.
- Check gums/mouth regularly and report any changes or signs of gum disease or oral lesions to a dental professional.
- Use sunscreen with an appropriate SPF for lips and skin protection.
- Eat a nutritional, well-balanced diet.
- Don't smoke or use smokeless tobacco.

*As professional health-care providers, dental hygienists are primarily concerned with promoting good oral health. Dental hygiene is among the largest of the regulated health-care professions in the province. In Ontario all dental hygienists are registered with the College of Dental Hygienists of Ontario, which regulates the profession to ensure the public receives safe and ongoing comprehensive oral care.*

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