



CANADIAN  
DENTAL  
ASSOCIATION

## It starts in childhood, but maintaining good oral health calls for lifelong care

# Dental health



Canada may have one of the best oral health care systems in the world, and the oral health of Canadians as a whole has improved considerably over the past 30 years, but Dr. Robert MacGregor, president of the Canadian Dental Association (CDA), says that's no reason for complacency.

"We need to not only maintain our current high standard of oral health care, but also work hard to help ensure that all communities across Canada have access to oral health care," says Dr. MacGregor.

This is important because the CDA believes that oral health is an integral part of general health and that all Canadians have a right to good oral health. While dental decay is a preventable chronic disease, a collaborative approach is needed among oral, medical and other health care providers, provincial and federal health departments and educators to combat it.

"Research has shown that there is a link between oral disease and other health problems such as diabetes, heart disease and stroke, as well as pre-term and low-birth-weight babies," says Dr. MacGregor. "Although researchers are just beginning to understand the link, evidence shows that oral disease can aggravate other health problems and that keeping a healthy mouth is an important part of leading a healthy life."



Dr. Robert MacGregor

The CDA recommends a five-step process to help ensure a healthy lifestyle and reduce the risk of oral disease:

1. See your dentist regularly—regular dental exams and professional cleanings are the best way to prevent problems or to stop small problems from getting worse.
2. Keep your mouth clean—brush your teeth and tongue at least twice a day, and floss once a day.
3. Eat, drink and be wary—healthy food is good for your general health and your oral health. The nutrients that come from healthy foods help fight cavities and gum disease.
4. Check your mouth regularly—look for warning signs of gum disease and oral cancer.
5. Avoid tobacco products—smoking and chewing tobacco can cause oral cancer as well as many other types of cancer and disease.

"Dentists are trained to look for

signs of oral disease, which often goes unnoticed and may lead to or be a sign of serious health problems in other parts of the body," says Dr. MacGregor.

However, while regular dental examinations by a dentist are essential to maintain oral health, Dr. MacGregor says people should also examine their own mouths often to pick up early signs of potential problems.

"For example, sore or sensitive gums, bleeding when you brush or floss, or bad breath that won't go away could be signs of gum disease, which is one of the main reasons why adults lose their teeth.

"People should also look for warning signs of oral cancer, which usually occurs on the sides and bottom of the tongue and the floor of the mouth. These can include symptoms such as bleeding that can't be explained, open sores that don't heal within seven to 10 days, white or red patches, numbness or tingling, or small lumps and thickening on the sides or bottom of the tongue, the floor or roof of the mouth, the inside of the cheeks or on the gums," says Dr. MacGregor.

The CDA says maintaining a healthy diet is good for general health as well as dental health. Sugar is one of the main causes of dental problems, so the consumption of foods that contain sugar should be limited.

Dr. MacGregor says teaching children good oral health habits from an early age is the best way to help ensure that they will continue to care for their teeth and mouths throughout their lives.

"While dental decay is not reversible, it is preventable in

most cases. If people look after their teeth, brush them twice a day, visit their dentist for regular exams and eat sensibly, there's no reason why they should not keep their teeth throughout their lives," says Dr. MacGregor.

### Specialists for all patients' needs

#### There are nine recognized dental specialties in Canada.

Depending on specific treatment needs, dentists may refer patients to a specialist in one of the nine areas of specialization. Dentists become specialists by successfully completing an accredited advanced education program in the specialty field of their choice and hold such specialty designation from a Provincial Dental Regulatory Authority. The nine specialties are:



1. Dental Public Health
2. Endodontics
3. Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery
4. Oral Medicine and Pathology
5. Oral and Maxillofacial Radiology
6. Orthodontics and Dentofacial Orthopedics
7. Pediatric Dentistry
8. Periodontics
9. Prosthodontics

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online? Visit the Canadian Dental Association at [cda-adc.ca](http://cda-adc.ca), on Facebook (Canadian Dental Health) or Twitter at @MyDentalHealth.

### FACTS AND BENEFITS



## Experts agree: water fluoridation saves teeth

The Canadian Dental Association (CDA) has no doubt that adding fluoride to public drinking water is one of the single most important measures to help reduce the incidence of dental decay.

CDA manager for Dental Programs, Dr. Euan Swan, says there is clear evidence that fluoride helps natural tooth enamel remineralize, and it is important that Canadians understand the facts and the benefits of fluoride.

"The appropriate use of fluorides in dentistry is one of the most successful preventive health

measures in the history of health care. Over 50 years of extensive research throughout the world has consistently demonstrated the safety and effectiveness of fluorides in the prevention of dental decay," says Dr. Swan.

The CDA has supported the fluoridation of community water since it was introduced in 1953. The association believes fluoride in drinking water is a safe and effective preventative measure, particularly for communities at high risk of tooth decay.

Dr. Arthur Conn, assistant chief dental officer, Health

Canada, says drinking water that is optimally fluoridated is safe and will help protect children's teeth.

Dr. Swan says research has shown that fluoride can reduce dental decay by between 20 per cent and 40 per cent in children by protecting and strengthening their tooth enamel. Provincial and territorial governments regulate the quality of drinking water in their jurisdiction. Decisions on fluoridation are made by each municipality in collaboration with the appropriate provincial or territorial

authority. The current level in Canada is set at 0.7 mg per litre of water.

"Science clearly indicates that exposure to fluoride in drinking water at levels below the maximum acceptable concentration of 1.5 mg per litre provides protection against cavities and does not result in any adverse health effects. Scientific reviews conducted by Health Canada and by a number of international agencies also supports these findings," he says.

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## Regular exams catch more than just cavities

Anyone who has suffered through the agony of a toothache because they didn't catch a small problem before it became a big problem will have learned a valuable lesson the hard way – don't neglect your regular dental examination.

It's an issue that dentists can't stress strongly enough: regular dental examinations not only catch tooth decay at an early stage, but also help identify many other potential oral health problems before they become serious.

Dr. Bruce Ward, president of the British Columbia Dental Association, says dentistry is all about prevention and early detection.

"Dentistry is focused on keeping patients healthy through preventive care. Unlike many other diseases or illnesses, dental disease is not reversible. By the time a patient recognizes that an issue exists, it may be more serious and require more extensive treatment than if identified and diagnosed earlier through a dental exam," says Dr. Ward.

Aging baby boomers in particular need to pay careful attention to their oral health because of the physiological changes that occur as they get older.

"Gums recede as we age and roots are exposed, which makes



Dr. Lynn Tomkins

**"The early signs of oral cancer are very easy to miss, and it concerns me when people aren't seeing their dentist regularly."**

them more susceptible to decay. Many people don't realize that their gums are receding because it happens slowly. Regular exams are the best way to identify that the process has started, and what can be done to slow it down," says Dr. Ward.

In addition, older adults may be exposed to other oral risks that they don't face when they are younger, such as sore spots from dentures and the effects of diabetes, which can include bleeding gums.

"In general, baby boomers need more maintenance to help prevent periodontal disease, and that means regular examinations," says Dr. Ward.

Obviously, dental exams are not exactly the same for everyone. Factors such as age, dental health status, level of general health, medication use and lifestyle choices influence what the dentist will include in the dental exam.

During the exam, the dentist also looks beyond the teeth and the gums. They will examine all of the soft tissues of the mouth including the lips, tongue, cheeks, upper and lower surfaces of the mouth, and the area of the throat at the back of the mouth looking for anything unusual that could suggest oral disease or signs of other health conditions.

For Dr. Lynn Tomkins, president of the Ontario Dental Association, the importance of regular dental exams became very personal when a routine dental exam for her father, Lawrence Preston Tomkins, identified a small swollen area on his lip. She referred the 85-year-old veteran to an oral surgeon. A biopsy revealed dysplasia, a precursor to oral cancer.

"I see my father often and never noticed the swelling until I had him in the right environment – the dental chair," says Dr. Tomkins. "The early signs of oral cancer are very easy to miss, and it concerns me when people aren't seeing their dentist regularly."

Dr. Tomkins says dentists, as oral health experts, are in a unique position to help in the early diagnosis of many medical conditions, including oral cancer.

It's critical that oral cancer be diagnosed as early as possible to increase a patient's chances of a full recovery. But signs of oral cancer can be easy to miss unless you know what you are looking for, says Dr. Tomkins.

"Most people see their dentist regularly, so he or she is often the first health care professional to have an opportunity to detect the early signs of oral cancer," she says.

### What does oral health mean to you?

The Canadian Dental Association defines oral health as a state of the oral and related tissues and structures that contributes positively to physical, mental and social well-being and the enjoyment of life's possibilities, by allowing the individual to speak, eat and socialize unhindered by pain, discomfort or embarrassment.



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Voted winner  
"Grooming Products"  
category by consumers

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## Water fluoridation saves teeth

Dr. Swan says parents who have questions about fluoride for their children should talk to their dentist or to public health officials who specialize in dental health care.

“The CDA’s position is that the weight of scientific evidence indicates that there are no health risks associated with fluoridation at the appropriate levels and that the benefits are very significant,” says Dr. Swan.

In a letter on the Health Canada website, Canada’s chief dental officer, Dr. Peter Cooney, says the safety and efficacy of water fluoridation has been frequently studied and continues to be supported by current science.

“Canadian and international studies agree that water that was fluoridated at optimum levels does not cause adverse health effects. Canada has one of the

best systems in the world to ensure water quality. Health Canada supports water fluoridation as a public health measure to prevent dental decay. Dental disease is the number one chronic disease among children and adolescents in North America; fluoridation can therefore be an important public health measure,” wrote Dr. Cooney.



## Tooth decay a pathway to serious issues

While good oral hygiene, including twice daily brushing and once daily flossing, and a well-balanced diet are the best way to help ensure healthy teeth and gums, cavities can and do occur for a variety of reasons. Catching them early and preventing them from becoming worse is a primary reason for having regular dental exam.

Tooth decay, which can lead to cavities, typically starts just below the surface of the tooth. If left untreated, it can damage the structure of the tooth and eventually lead to a hole. A dental filling is the most common treatment for a cavity.

Dentists identify decay by looking for pits and grooves or soft spots on the teeth. Sometimes they take X-rays to check inside the teeth for areas that can’t be seen by a visual exam. If signs of tooth decay are found, it is important to stop it from spreading.

Depending on the stage of the disease, the dentist may try to heal it with fluoride applications. He or she may also suggest changes to a patient’s oral hygiene routine or diet. If left untreated, decay can lead to large cavities that may not only cause serious pain, but can result in infection, loss of the tooth and damage to the gums.

ADVERTORIAL

## Take care when choosing toothpaste

Health care professionals have long recognized the link between oral health care and the overall health of Canadians.

They say there is a proven connection between poor oral health and systemic disease such as diabetes in people of all ages and respiratory diseases particularly among elderly people. And now there is new research pointing to possible links between oral health and other systemic conditions such as heart disease and preterm, low-birth-weight babies.

But while awareness of the need to pay more attention to oral health is growing, consumers remain confused about the best options to care for their teeth and gums – and the situation is likely to become even more challenging as

ongoing innovation in oral health care brings new products to market.

The Wall Street Journal reported earlier this year that market-research firm Mintel International Group found that 69 new toothpastes hit store shelves in the U.S. in 2010. Although that number was down from 102 in 2007, it still left more than 350 distinct types or sizes of toothpaste on store shelves.

Some manufacturers of oral health care products such as GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) want to help consumers understand the differences between the many options now available to them.

GSK research has identified a growing shift in the public perception of oral care from personal

care (fresh breath and whiteness) to overall health care (disease treatment and prevention and condition treatment/management).

But the research has also shown that in spite of the changing attitudes, most consumers are still buying oral care products with a “one-size-fits-all” approach.

The range of options and difficulty in understanding what’s best for individual family members means many people simply buy one brand of toothpaste for everyone, which can lead to some people with specific oral health care needs not getting the right products.

While asking for professional advice from a dentist is still the best way to determine which oral health care products are most

suitable for each member of the family, GSK believes manufacturers also have an important role to play.

That’s why GSK is currently running a national oral health care program aimed at educating consumers about the differences in oral health care products. The program includes an easy to use online tool that helps shoppers assess their whole families’ oral care needs. The site [www.expertsmiles.ca](http://www.expertsmiles.ca) provides a simple checklist of needs to help determine the best oral health products for each member of the family. The site also offers tips to better oral health care to help drive an easier and more informed purchasing decision with the hopes of improving oral health care for all Canadians.

# SMILE LIKE A PRO.

Different people have different oral care needs, and having a plan to keep your entire family’s teeth healthy is essential. From sensitive teeth, to denture care, from acid erosion to all-around clean, our products will make your whole family smile. **Trust us. We’re the experts.**

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# All kids deserve good dental care

**M**ost parents know how important it is to teach their children to care for their teeth, but for many young Canadians, particularly in First Nations and Inuit communities, access to professional dental care can be difficult.

That's why the Canadian government launched the Children's Oral Health Initiative (COHI) in 2004. From an initial base of 38 communities, the program now includes 259 communities across Canada.

The objective is to address the disparity between the oral health of First Nations and Inuit and that of the general Canadian population.

Health Canada spokesperson Gary Holub says COHI has succeeded in broadening the availability of oral health care to the target communities. For example, the number of children under eight receiving fluoride varnish applications grew from 7,100 in 2003-04 to 16,300 in 2006-07.

While fluoride treatments are important to meet COHI's goal of reducing tooth decay among children, its objectives go well beyond that.

"COHI's aim is to improve oral health for First Nation and Inuit children to support overall good health. In doing so, we believe we will reduce the need for complex dental treatments requiring general anesthesia in hospital



settings," says Mr. Holub.

The remoteness of many First Nation and Inuit communities, and a lack of infrastructure to provide a full range of dental services in many locations is a challenge when it comes to accessing services.

To help overcome these potential obstacles, a key element of COHI is the use of community-based individuals, known as COHI Aides, who are trained to provide specific COHI services. This approach supports the development of capacity at the community level and provides an ongoing link to oral health within the community, says Mr. Holub.

The Canadian Dental Association agrees that capacity building in First Nation and Inuit communities is important to improved oral health.

In a position paper published last year, the CDA said the COHI program could be further improved by increasing the number of dental health work-

ers on reserves and attracting more Aboriginal people to dental professions.

The paper called for the creation and support of educational programs to promote culturally appropriate education programs to help prevent oral disease and tooth loss at all stages of life.

Also last year, the CDA and the Assembly of First Nations joined forces to call for better access to oral health care.

In a statement announcing a meeting with First Nations leaders, the CDA said First Nations people experience much higher rates of dental disease than other Canadians. Cavity rates are four to five times higher and gum diseases are widespread. Rampant oral disease negatively affects quality of life in areas such as education, employment and nutrition. Additionally, the disease cycle of gum diseases can be an exacerbating factor in diabetes control, a significant health issue First Nation communities.

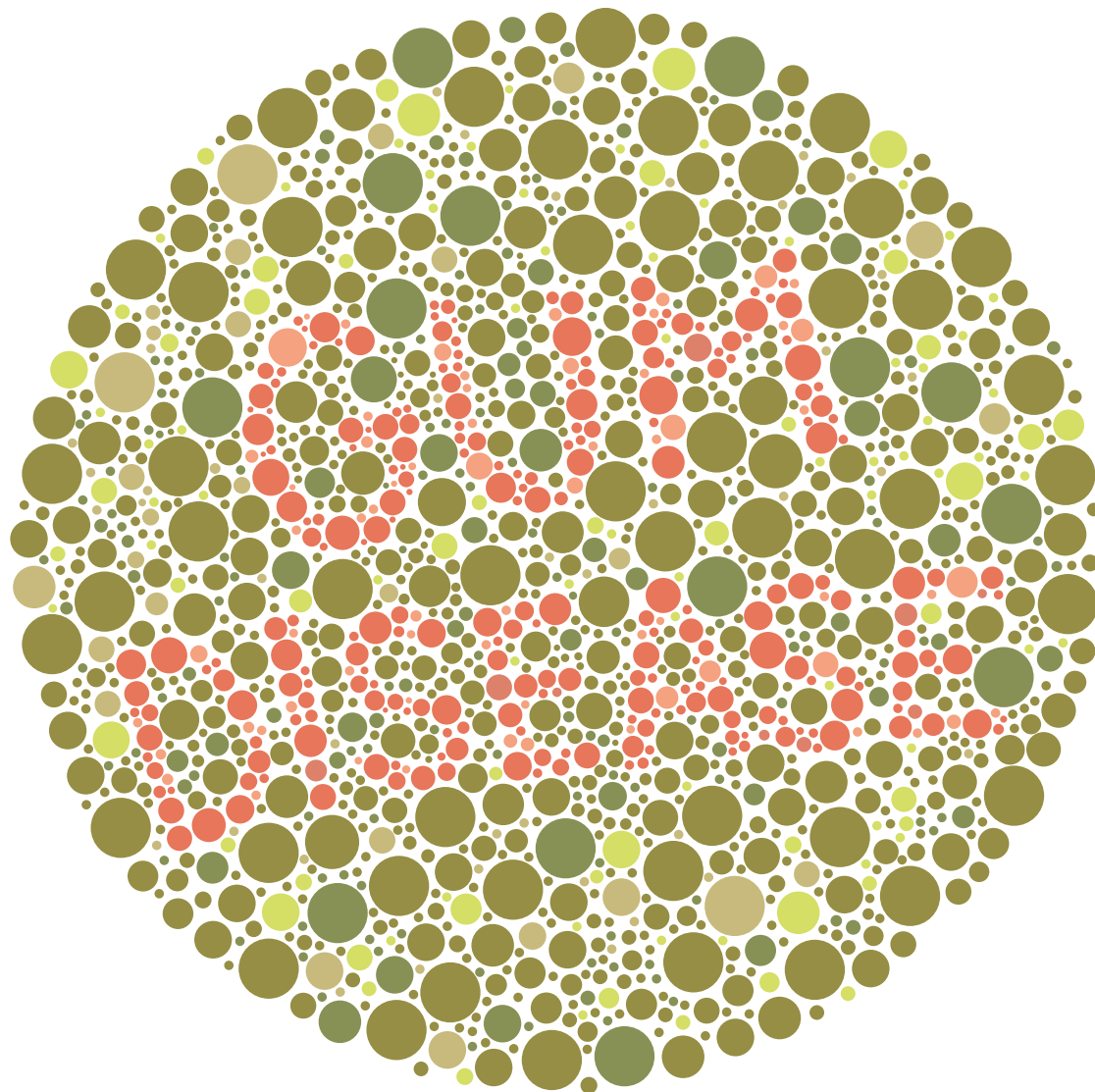
## Addressing disparities is essential

Oral health is an integral part of general health and should be available to all Canadians, according to the Canadian Dental Association (CDA).

In a position statement on access to oral health care for all Canadians adopted last year, the CDA acknowledges that finding solutions to the multitude of problems of access to oral health care is not simple, and no single organization, government agency or community can solely address the disparities in the oral health of Canadians.

The CDA believes that only a collaborative approach among those who have the capacity to contribute to the challenge will lead to equitable access to dental care and ensure good oral and general health for more Canadians.

As the organization that advocates on behalf of one of the leading providers of oral health care in Canada, the CDA recommends the development of a national action plan to reduce the barriers to dental care. The action plan should include minimum mandatory standards for Canadian dental public health programs and the provision of sufficient resources to meet those standards. In addition, alternative models of care or funding should be explored to alleviate access to care inequities.



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# Tobacco use increases risk of oral cancer

For dentists, the harmful impact of tobacco is clearly visible every day. From discoloured teeth and bad breath to gum disease and oral cancer, they see it all in patients who smoke, chew tobacco or use snuff.

“The use of tobacco products has a devastating effect on oral health,” says Dr. Phil Poon, chairman of the Canadian Dental Association’s Advocacy Committee.

“Practising dentists are uniquely positioned to show patients what tobacco use can lead to, such as pre-cancerous lesions, oral cancer and gum diseases that may cause tooth loss and bad breath,” says Dr. Poon.

The CDA feels so strongly about the detrimental effects of smoking on health that it has



Dr. Phil Poon

adopted an official policy position affirming the need to eliminate the use of all tobacco products in Canada and establish a norm of non-smoking as a social attitude for Canadians.

Dr. Poon says the CDA encourages practising dentists to raise

the issue of tobacco use with their patients and offer cessation options and support to those patients who are eager to quit using tobacco products.

The association also advocates to demand that Canada remain a world leader in tobacco control initiatives, and played a part, through the Canadian Coalition for Action on Tobacco, in having a photograph of a diseased mouth included in the graphic warning labels on tobacco packages.

In line with its view that dentists have a leading role to play in helping patients quit using tobacco products, the CDA encourages its members to complete smoking cessation training programs to meet the needs of their patients, says Dr. Poon.

“Just as a person’s decision to use tobacco is the result of a complex interaction of factors that varies from one individual to another, the reduction of tobacco use requires a comprehensive, strategy that includes prevention, cessation and protection for non-smokers from second-hand smoke and other harmful effects of tobacco,” he says.

According to Health Canada, it’s not only tobacco use that increases the risk of oral cancer; chewing betel quid, paan and areca nut is also risky.

The Canadian Cancer Society says not smoking cigarettes, cigars and pipes or using other tobacco products such as smokeless tobacco is the most effective way to prevent oral cancer.



The Canadian Dental Association’s Seal of Recognition is a symbol that identifies products that are of benefit to the oral health of consumers. The seal is designed to help the public and dental professionals make informed choices.

The CDA’s consumer product and professional product recognition programs provide valuable information to consumers and professionals on a wide range of dental products. Market research by manufacturers has shown that the CDA’s seal on a product directly impacts purchasing decisions of consumers and dental professionals.

These products are of value when used in a conscientiously applied program of oral hygiene and regular professional care.

## DID YOU KNOW?

# Bridges and dentures help fill the gaps

If a tooth is lost, it is usually important to replace it with a false tooth as soon as possible. This procedure will prevent your remaining teeth from drifting out of line and causing other problems. Two ways of replacing teeth are bridges and dentures. Both can be supported by dental implants when adequate support is not available in the mouth or when there

is a need to preserve adjoining natural teeth.

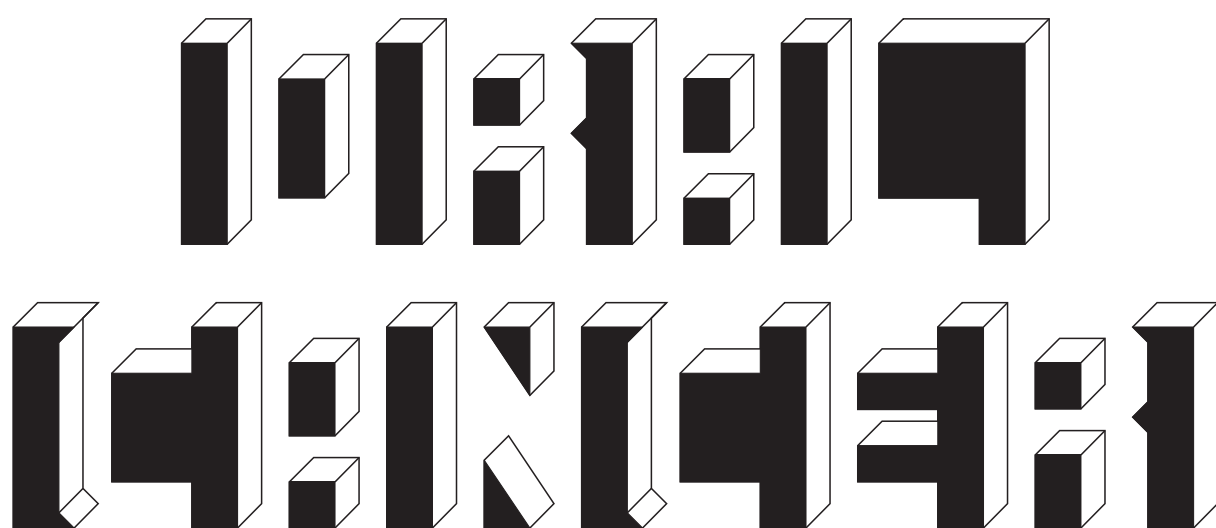
A bridge can replace one or more missing teeth and is held firmly in place by healthy teeth on each side of the missing ones. Bridges are permanent and cannot be removed.

Dentures, on the other hand, can be removed. There are two types of dentures: partial and full. Both types are made in a

dental lab, based on a mould of your mouth. A partial denture is made up of one or more false teeth, and held in place by clasps that fit onto nearby teeth. You can take the partial denture out yourself for cleaning and at night. A partial denture may be used when nearby teeth are not strong enough to hold a bridge, or when more than just a few teeth are missing.

A full denture can be used when all your natural teeth are missing. Remember, you need to care for a denture as carefully as you would look after your natural teeth.

Plaque builds up on a denture just as it does on natural teeth. Unless plaque is removed from your denture, it can spread to your natural teeth and gums, causing gum disease and cavities.



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