

Busting the Denture Myths

When it comes to myths, dentures have spawned a colorful collection. Unfortunately, many of these common misconceptions about dentures have prevented people from achieving their best health, appearance and self-confidence.

The fact of the matter is that proper denture fit, maintenance and regular dental care can positively impact each of the 32,000,000 Americans who wear full or partial dentures. So check out the following 11 myths. You may be surprised to find out that one or two you have accepted as “fact,” are in fact, “fiction.”

“Dentures last forever!”

While it’s true that dentures are durable, they aren’t any more permanent than eyeglasses. Dropping them even a few inches can break a tooth or the denture base, Even with conscientious care, denture teeth can lose their natural appearance and chewing ability due to chewing, brushing and age.

The way you care for your dentures can also alter their fit. Dentures can warp if placed in hot water. If they become dried out, they may change shape. When you remove your dentures at night, place them in a container of denture-cleaning solution. Also, it’s best to use a brush designed for dentures as well as a denture cleaner rather than toothpaste, because some dentifrices may be too abrasive for dentures.

“Once you have dentures, you don’t need to see a dentist anymore.”

This is probably the most common myth about dentures, and it’s wrong for several very important reasons. You should see your dentist *regularly* for an oral examination, because your mouth is continually changing. Mouth tissue can reveal signs of diseases, such as diabetes, that first manifest themselves in the mouth. Besides checking your dentures, the dentist will check for signs of oral cancer, and examine your gum ridges, tongue and jaw joints.

Of course, your dentures need attention, too. Important indicators of their condition:

- **Looseness** caused by tissue changes.
- **Bad odor** caused by absorption of fluid and bacteria.
- **Color change** due to age or a reaction to mouth fluids.
- **Stains and calculus deposits** resulting from mouth fluids

“Everyone knows when you’re wearing dentures. It’s embarrassing.”

This is true only if your dentures look unnatural or need re-fitting. Many of the “tell-tale” signs of dentures – clicking or slipping, unpleasant odor or stains – are actually signs of poor fit or improper home maintenance. Regular professional examinations and following your dentist’s instructions on home care are essential steps in assuring a “natural appearance.”

Confidence in wearing dentures comes from realizing that you have taken a positive step towards improving your health and appearance. Protecting your oral health with properly fitting dentures is a smart move!

Denture wearers can’t eat normally, or even speak properly”

While not all denture wearers can eat everything they would like, many have very few restrictions in their diets. So, if you develop persistent speech or eating problems *at any time*, have your dentist check the fit of your denture as soon as possible.

Good nutrition is just as important for mature adults as it is for younger persons. Properly fitting dentures may actually encourage you to eat a varied and well-balanced diet that maximizes your overall health. And, you’ll be able to enjoy the social benefits that make dining with friends such a pleasant experience.

“I *have* to use adhesives to make my dentures fit, or I can’t wear them all day”

This is particularly dangerous myth. Dentures are made to fit precisely and usually do not require regular use of an adhesive for comfort. In an emergency, denture adhesives can be used to keep the dentures stable until you see the dentist, but prolonged use can mask infections and cause bone loss in the jaw. Likewise, a poorly fitting denture, which causes constant irritation over a long period, may contribute to the development of sores and tumors. If your dentures begin to feel loose, or cause pronounced discomfort, see your dentist immediately.

“Dentures aren’t like natural teeth; they’re not affected by over-the-counter and prescription medications.”

Drugs can affect denture fit and wearability. For example, certain medications can reduce the supply of saliva in your mouth, making it difficult to swallow or chew. So let your dentist know of any medications you may be taking regularly- or even occasionally.

I have a fixed income. Regular dental care is too expensive.”

Before deciding that oral examinations and denture care is too costly, discuss the situation with your dentist. Be frank. Ask about charges for denture adjustments, repairs and possible replacement. Keep in mind that if you are in your 60s, you are likely to have twenty more years of talking, eating and smiling. Your oral health is a vital part of your total health.

“I can make my own denture repairs.”

Even if you are a whiz at fixing toasters, leaky pipes or automobiles, do not try to adjust or repair your dentures yourself.

Improperly relined dentures can be bulky, causing increased pressure on the jaw and more rapid loss of jawbone. Do-it-yourself reliners can also irritate the soft tissues of your mouth. The handyman approach can cause irreparable damage and may result in the need for a new denture.

“I’ll be without teeth for days if I take my denture to the dentist for refitting or repair.”

Advances in modern dentistry have made it possible for your dentist to reline or repair dentures quickly – often right in the office. If you let your dentist know that you are in need of a denture repair, the correction can frequently be made on the same day.

“I know I should have my denture replaced, but I just don’t want to go through a long adjustment period again.”

The first time is always the hardest. You’re a pro now. You’ve learned the basics about eating, speaking and wearing a denture. There will be some adjustment, but it will probably be shorter and easier than the first time.. And it is important! Prolonged use of ill fitting dentures can irritate the gums, tongue and cheek, and even cause the ridges of your mouth to shrink to the point where it will almost be impossible to fit you with normal dentures. Your ability to chew may decrease, and your face may acquire deep aging lines and wrinkles. When you look at the big picture, the temporary adjustment period isn’t so bad.

“All dentures are the same. It makes sense to shop around and look for the lowest price.”

Only a dentist is qualified to provide denture services. Before prescribing a denture, the dentist reviews your health history, performs thorough oral examination and carefully measures and prepares your mouth for your dentures.

Dentists work closely with reputable dental laboratories, where trained technicians make your dentures to match your dentist’s specifications. Mail order specials for self-fitting dentures are a waste of money, and can cause serious oral health problems.

So see your dentist. Or, if you need assistance in locating a dentist in your area, contact your local dental society. Your health, comfort and appearance should not be left to chance!