

# Replacing Your Lost Tooth



*Losing a front tooth can be embarrassing because it affects your looks and your speech.*

*Losing a back tooth can affect how well you chew your food.*

*Apart from these, losing any tooth can adversely affect the health of your gums and teeth.*

## What happens when a tooth is lost?

The loss of a tooth affects your health in several ways. The diagram below shows an example of what can happen when a lower back tooth (molar) is lost. The teeth on either side of the empty space tilt towards the space (small arrows). The tooth in the upper jaw will continue to grow downwards or over-erupt (big arrow) because it no longer has a tooth to bite on.



As a result of this tilting and over-eruption, the teeth are no longer in alignment and there are uneven contacts between the teeth. The tilting of teeth also creates areas between the teeth where food debris and bacteria collect. These areas are especially difficult to clean so tooth decay and gum disease often develop in these areas.

All these problems can be prevented by replacing the lost tooth. Replacing the lost tooth after the tilting and over-eruption have occurred, can be quite difficult.

## Methods of replacing teeth

### 1. Dentures

Dentures are removable artificial teeth. They should be removed after every meal and cleaned. They should also be removed when you go to sleep. Dentures are most commonly used when several teeth need to be replaced.

Normally, after an extraction, one must wait a few months for the gums and bone to heal before dentures can be made.

In some cases, an immediate denture can be made before the extraction so that it can be worn immediately after the tooth is extracted. Such dentures are temporary and will need to be replaced within 6 months. During this period, the denture would need to be adjusted a few times to fit the healing gums and bone.

Dentures are the cheapest way of replacing lost teeth.

### 2. Bridges

Bridges are fixed artificial teeth, i.e. they are rigid and cannot be removed. A bridge can only replace a few teeth and requires good, strong natural teeth on either side of the empty space to support the artificial teeth.

### 3. Implants

Implants are the latest technology available to help replace missing teeth. An implant is a device that is inserted directly into the bone at the site of the missing teeth. This requires surgery. After about 4-6 months, when the bone around the implant has healed, artificial teeth can be constructed over the implants.

As implants involve surgery, extra time and new technology, they are the most expensive method of replacing teeth.

Every method has its advantages and disadvantages. Your dentist is the best person to discuss these with you and help you decide the best way to replace your lost tooth.



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