

## How (and Why) to Avoid Wearing Dentures

Who wants to wear dentures? The answer is almost anyone without their own teeth or whose teeth are so loose or painful that they cannot eat.

What's good about dentures? A quality denture can restore a very natural and cosmetic smile and improve function compared to missing or painful teeth.

What's bad about dentures? The list is long, but I'll touch on several items.

**Poor Stability**—Chewing with dentures is absolutely nothing like chewing with real teeth. Upper dentures generally are more stable than lower dentures, but there is no denture that the patient can forget they are wearing. Lowers especially are prone to coming loose due to the anatomy of the lower jaw. Denture adhesives may help a little, but dental implants are the only real solution.

**Poor Chewing Ability**—It is literally impossible to bite anywhere near as hard with dentures because they are sitting on the soft, sensitive gum tissue. When biting hard, the gum compresses between the hard denture and the hard jawbone, the gums say “ouch”.

**Poor Nutrition**—Compared to people with natural teeth, most people who wear dentures transition to a softer, more fattening, easier to chew, less healthy diet. The reasons are those just mentioned...poor stability and poor chewing ability.

**Poor Jaw Bone Maintenance**—You've heard the phrase “use it or lose it”. This can apply to your muscle, your brain, and your bones. Weight bearing exercise is critical to maintaining bone, that's why it is recommended to help prevent or manage osteoporosis. In all people, chewing on natural teeth (or implants) is the weight bearing exercise that the jaw bones need. When teeth are lost the bone around where the tooth was shrinks rapidly at first and then more slowly. Denture wear actually even speeds up the shrinkage process, which makes stability and chewing ability even worse over time.

Around 50 % of people 65 or older in the United States wear dentures. Fortunately this number continues to slowly drop due to improving dental care both professionally and at home.

Incidentally, most people don't lose all their teeth from cavities. More people end up in dentures due to periodontitis (also known as periodontal disease, gum disease, or pyorrhea).

So here's how to not become one of the 50%.

1. Look in the mirror. If you see dark spots, loose teeth or red and bleeding gums, you've got obvious problems that need professional care immediately.
2. Ask someone close if you have chronic bad breath. Many times bad breath is a symptom of gum disease. If your spouse won't kiss you anymore, your dentist can probably improve your love life!

3. Eat a healthy diet, don't smoke, and limit how often sweet or acidic things are in your mouth.
4. Brush and floss thoroughly! Good hygiene covers a multitude of diet sins.
5. See your dentist at least once a year!

Dental problems usually go unnoticed by the person for years. Both cavities and gum disease usually produce no pain until they are severe. The best and least expensive ways to treat dental disease, both cavities and gum problems, are when the problems are small. Don't wait till it hurts or you may be becoming a denture statistic!

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