



Dental Bridges

What are they?

Dental bridges are false teeth anchored on neighbouring teeth in order to replace one or more missing teeth. The false tooth is known as a pontic and is fused in between two crowns that serve as anchors by attaching to the teeth on each side of the false tooth and thereby bridging them together.

What are the parts of a typical dental bridge (fixed)?

A dental bridge essentially consists of

- A pontic or false tooth used to replace the missing tooth, and is made from gold, alloys, porcelain or a combination of these materials;
- Two crowns serving to anchor the false tooth in place.

When are dental bridges needed?

Bridges are recommended when there are one or more teeth missing that affect your

- Smile and appearance
- Bite as a result of adjacent teeth leaning into the space and altering the way the upper and lower teeth bite together
- Speech
- Shape of your face
- Gum disease and tooth decay as a result of food accumulated in the gap

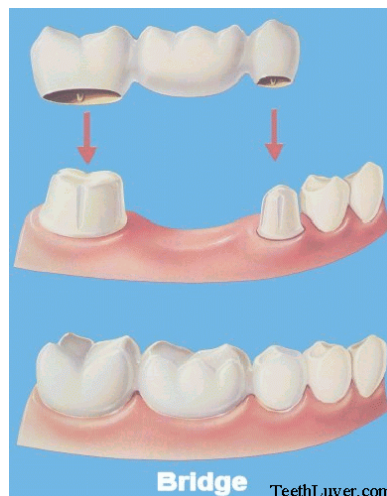
Why should I replace missing teeth?

- To improve your appearance
- To reduce the strain on the teeth at either side of the missing tooth
- To prevent the neighbouring teeth from leaning into the resulting gap and altering the bite
- To prevent gum disease and tooth decay due to accumulation of food in the gap

There are four main types of dental bridges

Traditional Fixed Bridge

This is the most commonly used type of bridge and consists of a pontic fused between two porcelain crowns that are anchored on neighbouring teeth. The pontic is usually made of either porcelain fused to metal or ceramic. These are fixed and cannot be removed.



Advantages

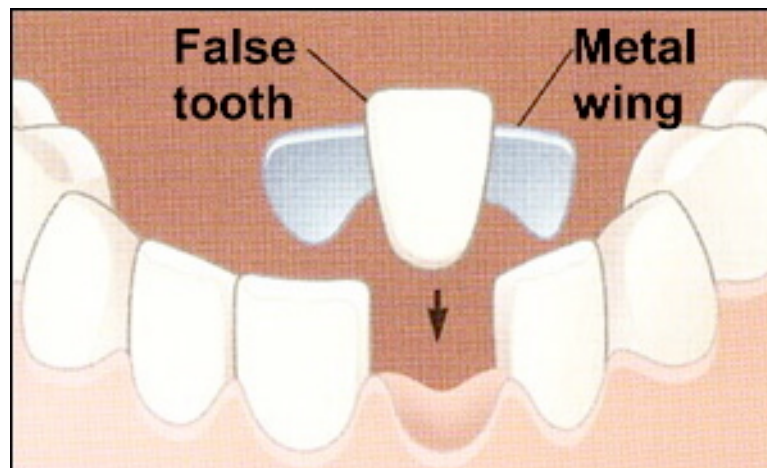
- Longest life span (5 to 15 years)
- Easy to clean
- Improves your bite
- Helps prevent movement of adjacent and opposing teeth.

Disadvantages:

- More tooth reduction needed (thus increasing the risk of the tooth dying and then root canal treatment would be needed), if the gum has receded a lot it may be difficult to look natural.

Resin Bonded Bridges or Maryland bonded bridges

These are opted when the gap to be filled is in between the front teeth and when the adjacent teeth on either side of the missing tooth are strong and healthy without large fillings. The false tooth is made of porcelain and is fused to metal bands that are stuck to the adjacent teeth using resin glue that is hidden from view.



Advantages

- Very little tooth reduction needed.

Disadvantages

- Shorter life span (5 to 10 years), only for use where less bite force is required, as less strong.

Fibre Reinforced Bonded Bridges

These are similar, but use a reinforced white filling material to anchor the false tooth to the adjacent teeth either side. They are aesthetic and best used if the adjacent teeth already have fillings within them.



Advantages:

- More aesthetic, less tooth reduction needed

Disadvantages

- Shorter life span

Cantilever Bridges

These are opted for areas such as the front teeth that are susceptible to lower stress. Cantilever bridges are used when there is teeth present only one side of the space, where the false tooth is anchored to one or more adjacent teeth on one side only



Advantages

- Less tooth structure reduced as fewer teeth required, more natural separation possible between teeth
- Life Span (5 to 15 years)

Disadvantages

- Less structural support
- Unless the bite is perfectly balanced, too much torque (twisting force) can damage the replacement tooth.

What are bridges made of?

Bridges are usually made of porcelain bonded to precious metal (often gold and palladium, or a combination of both). Sometimes, there are other non-precious metals used in the base for strength. There are also bridges made of reinforced fibre composite (white filling) material.

What are the steps involved in the procedure for fitting in dental bridges?

At the first appointment:

- The dentist will numb the area with a mild anaesthetic
- The teeth on either side of the space are prepared by trimming away a small area in order to accommodate the new crown over them
- The dentist then uses dental putty to make an impression of the teeth, which will be used to make the bridge and crown in the laboratory
- A temporary bridge is fitted in to protect the exposed gums and teeth
- A shade guide may be used to determine the right shade for the dental bridge, by selecting a shade that resembles natural colour variations in your teeth.

At the second appointment:

- The temporary bridge is removed and the custom made bridge is fitted in and checked for its fit and bite, and adjusted accordingly. It is then cemented in place
- Sometimes an additional visit may be required to check and adjust the fit.

How long will dental bridges last?

Dental bridges can last 10-15 years provided that you maintain good dental hygiene and eating habits.

How to take care of your dental bridges?

Maintain good dental hygiene:

- Clean the dental bridge everyday and prevent tooth decay, bad breath and gum disease
- Clean under the false tooth every day with special floss known as super floss. Or a floss threader with regular floss.
- Keep the remaining teeth healthy as these serve as the foundation for the dental bridge

Brushing and flossing:

- Brush twice and floss daily
- To floss using a bridge floss threader, which is a flexible piece of plastic with a loop at one end to thread the floss

- Thread one end of a 14 to 18 inches piece of dental floss through the loop, making sure to leave one side about half as long as the other
- Insert the end of the flosser without the hole in between the bridge and the gumline
- Hold onto the longer piece of floss, gently bring it up and pull the pointed end all the way through
- Floss using both your hands, moving the floss back and forth under the bridge
- Floss the bridge completely from one end to the other

Diet and eating habits:

- Eat soft foods or food cut into small pieces until you get accustomed to the dental bridge
- Eat a balanced and nutritious diet for good general and dental health

What are the advantages of dental bridges?

- They are natural in their appearance
- They generally require only two appointments with the dentist
- They have a good life period, lasting for 10-15 years, provided that you maintain good dental hygiene,
- They improve your appearance, bite issues as well as speech problems occurring as a result of missing teeth

What are the disadvantages of dental bridges?

- Teeth become mildly sensitive to extreme temperatures for a few weeks
- They require healthy tooth tissue from neighboring teeth to be removed
- Your teeth and gums are vulnerable to infection as a result of accumulation of bacteria due to the food acids if proper hygiene is not maintained.
- There is, as with all dental treatments that involve removal of tooth surface, a chance that the nerve in the tooth will die, and necessitating root canal treatment.