Choices In Replacement Teeth Improve With Age

New Technologies Improve Comfort and Appearance

OAK BROOK, IL (Sept. 11, 2006) – Tooth loss among adults is far less common than it was just a few decades ago, but replacing missing or damaged teeth is no less important an issue for many. People value the health benefits and aesthetics behind a nice smile, and improvements to dentures and implant technologies offer people better replacement options than ever before.

“There are many good tooth replacement options for people to choose from,” said Dr. Max Anderson, D.D.S., a national oral health advisor for Delta Dental Plans Association. “Cost, comfort and appearance usually top the list of considerations, and the choices available today offer something for almost everyone.”

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one fourth of adults over 60 years of age have lost all of their teeth.1 Another government report notes the number of people without natural teeth is down 40 percent from just 20 years ago.2

Tooth loss can result from tooth decay, gum disease or injuries. Whatever the cause, the consequences of missing teeth can affect quality of life issues such as how we speak and interact with others. Left untreated, tooth loss may contribute to nutrition problems by limiting the types of food we can eat. It can also affect adjacent teeth, worsening the overall effects of tooth loss.
Removable dentures and bridges (fixed partial dentures) have been the traditional replacements for missing teeth. A removable denture is generally made from plastic, ceramic, metal or a combination of these materials. Complete dentures are used when all natural teeth are missing and partial dentures for situations where not all teeth are missing. Improvements in the methods used to size and fit dentures, as well as in the materials used to construct the replacement teeth, enable oral health practitioners to provide patients with natural looking and comfortable dentures. Bridges are made of metals, ceramics and combinations of these and other materials. They are used when there are a limited number of missing teeth.

Dental implants are also a popular option to replace missing teeth. Implants are metal posts that are surgically placed beneath a patient’s gums. Over time, the implants fuse to jawbones, acting as artificial roots. Oral health professionals then mount dentures, bridges or individual teeth to the implants.

Some of the advantages offered by implants include that they don’t need to be taken out at night, and they don’t slip or shift when speaking and eating. However, implants are more costly than removable dentures and may or may not be covered by dental benefit plans.

Whether patients choose removable dentures or dental implants, good oral hygiene and visits to the dental office remain an important part of a comprehensive personal health plan.

“People needing to replace missing or damaged teeth should begin the process by talking to their dentist. Their knowledge of your teeth and a discussion of your personal circumstances can help you plan the best solution for your unique situation,” Dr. Anderson said.

Delta Dental Plans Association, based in Oak Brook, IL, is a national network of independent not-for-profit dental service corporations specializing in providing dental benefits programs to over 47 million Americans in more than 81,000 employee groups throughout the country.

# # #
