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Many people think teeth are only necessary for chewing. Although they do play an important role in chewing, which is the first step in the process of digestion, they also help with speech, supporting facial structures, and keeping the jaw properly aligned. When a tooth is lost and not replaced the teeth surrounding and opposing the space will move to compensate for the lost tooth. As a result, a situation is created that can lead to periodontal disease, decay, difficulty pronouncing certain sounds, difficulty chewing, TMJ pain, or even changes in facial symmetry. This is why it is important to replace teeth when they are lost.

Choices to replace teeth and the range of fees may seem intimidating at first, so here is a discussion of the different types of replacement options.

Removable partial dentures usually replace several teeth in the upper or lower jaw. This type of prosthesis is removable and is taken in and out of the mouth. It uses clasps as anchors for retention but is not permanently connected to any other teeth. It is made of plastic and metal. This is a good option if there are several missing teeth in the same arch. An upper (maxillary) partial will span across the hard palate of the mouth for retention and stability. A lower (mandibular) partial will have a metal bar that extends behind the lower front teeth. Partial dentures need to be removed for daily cleaning and maintenance. Partials do collect food under them as you eat and need adjustments by the dentist from time to time. It is important to keep

the supporting anchor teeth healthy as their loss or damage can cause the partial to become ill fitting.

A fixed bridge is a restoration that is permanently attached to the teeth. It does not come in and out of the mouth. A bridge can replace one or more missing teeth, but there must be appropriate supporting teeth on either side of the space. Each supporting tooth is crowned and an artificial tooth is suspended in between, hence the name bridge. A bridge is generally made of metal, porcelain, or a combination of the two. Porcelain creates a more natural realistic esthetic. One of the main concerns with bridges is cleaning ability as cleaning underneath the bridge requires special tools. If not maintained properly, the anchor teeth on either side can decay or develop periodontal issues. Thus, the long term success of a bridge depends on the stability and health of the two anchor teeth.

An implant is a stand-alone restoration. It does not rely on existing teeth for support. Often it is considered the next best thing to having your own tooth. Implants can be used in many ways to replace missing teeth. The process of getting an implant requires two steps. First, a titanium cylinder is placed in the jaw to provide an artificial “root.” Once placed it has to heal and integrate with the surrounding bone. It often takes several months for this to occur. Once the implant integrates, crowns, bridgework, or even a denture can be made and attached to the implant(s). The advantages to this are numerous.

With a single tooth replacement the implant replaces the missing tooth without involving the adjacent teeth; it is fixed and stable. It is composed of all manmade materials, therefore it will not decay like a natural tooth. Care is the same as with a natural tooth; daily brushing and flossing is all that is required.

Complete dentures are an option when all teeth are missing. Conventional dentures use the existing bone structure for retention. Complete upper dentures use the natural curve of the palate to create suction which stabilizes the denture and creates retention. Complete lower dentures are solely dependent on the bone structure for stability and retention. Implants can help create additional retention and stability for both the upper and lower dentures. In this case two or more implants are placed in the jaw. Once healed there are numerous mechanisms that can be used to either be able to “snap” the denture in and out, or fix the denture more permanently into your mouth. An implant supported denture is an excellent choice for someone who has little supporting bone or wants added retention and stability of a denture.

Teeth play an important part in our everyday lives. If you have missing teeth make an appointment with us and we would be happy to help you make the right choice. See our Success-Coupon which includes an initial exam, a complete set of digital x-rays, and a comprehensive treatment plan for \$100—this is a \$200 value for half price.