The Denture-Wearer’s Guide to Eating the Foods You Want
INTRODUCTION

Enjoying a good meal – especially with family and friends – is one of the simple, but very fundamental pleasures of life. And eating well is extremely important to your health and well-being. So if you are facing the loss of all of your teeth in the upper jaw, lower jaw, or both or have already been fitted with dentures, you should know how to ensure that you can continue to eat well despite tooth loss.
What You Need To Know About Eating Well With Conventional Dentures

Conventional dentures – the standard, removable type that have been around for generations – have offered many people a practical solution when their natural teeth could not be saved. While several other options are available today, conventional dentures remain a common and economical restorative option. So what are the pros and cons of traditional dentures in terms of the ability to eat well?

Compared to eating with damaged, diseased, or missing teeth, conventional dentures will improve your ability to bite and chew. However, the transition from natural teeth – even if they weren’t healthy or strong – can be a difficult adjustment for many new denture wearers. One of the first adjustments people make is getting used to the bulk of conventional dentures in their mouths. Unlike natural teeth that are anchored to the jawbone, dentures rest on top of the gum ridge. As a result, they need a substantial contact base with the gums to stay in place. This is especially true of upper dentures, which use the suction created between the roof of the mouth and the denture for more secure retention.

Another key difference denture-wearers must adjust to is the reduced force that comes with denture use. Dentures exert about 10% of the force that natural teeth do as you bite and chew, which means that you’ll have to work harder to eat. This is especially true during the first few weeks with your new dentures, since the muscles in your mouth will have to be retrained and help the dentures function properly as you eat.

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As challenging as these issues can be for new denture-wearers, most do learn to eat fairly comfortably with practice. The key to doing that is taking things slowly during the “break-in” period, or the first several weeks of denture use. Here’s what you can do to help yourself adjust to conventional dentures:

» **Start out with very soft foods** – You may have to set aside tougher and crisper foods until you learn how to effectively control your dentures. Opt for softer, easy-to-chew foods, such as ground beef, fish, and soft-cooked vegetables. Add the more challenging foods back into your diet gradually as you begin to manage better.

» **Take very small bites** – Smaller bites, especially during the first days of your new denture, can help promote better chewing efficiency. A less crowded mouth means more room to manipulate food.

» **Distribute foods evenly in your mouth** – Placing half of a bite of food on one side of your mouth and half on the other will help distribute pressure on your new teeth evenly, which makes it easier to keep dentures in place as you chew.

» **Try not to bite down with the front of the denture** – Biting is generally done with the front teeth. With dentures, though, position foods off to the side as you bite to prevent the pressure from causing dentures losing their grip at the back of your mouth.

» **Use denture adhesives at first** – Dentures that are well-made and properly fit to your mouth shouldn’t need adhesives. However, during that awkward, learning-to-eat-with-dentures phase, they can help keep new teeth more stable until the muscles in your mouth strengthen.

If eating with dentures does not get easier after a few weeks of practice or you have a lot of gum irritation, pain, and/or dentures slipping, see your dentist to have your denture fit checked. Most denture-wearers need several adjustments to get a comfortable and stable fit. Additionally, you may need to make some permanent changes in your eating habits, such as slicing fruits rather than eating them whole.

**Longer-Term Difficulties Common With Conventional Dentures**

The fit of conventional dentures will change over time, causing them to gradually become looser and less stable. The lack of support from missing tooth roots in the jaw causes the bone to shrink. Also, the gum ridge supporting the dentures shrinks and changes as the bone beneath it does. This results in eroded denture support. For that reason, it is important to have your denture fit checked at least once a year. Dentures generally need to be relined or replaced every 3 to 5 years. Unfortunately, many denture-wearers may experience bone loss that, over years of denture use, becomes extensive enough that getting a stable denture fit is challenging or even impossible.
Options for Correcting or Avoiding Loose Denture Problems

Denture-wearers used to have to live with unstable dentures that can no longer be properly fitted. With today’s more advanced dental restoration options, the problem of loose, ill-fitting dentures can be avoided altogether.

Adding Stability to Loose Conventional Dentures with Dental Implants

Whether your dentures have become looser over years of wearing conventional dentures or you haven’t been able to achieve a fit that provides satisfactory comfort or stability, a few dental implants can help create a better outcome. Dental implants can be placed in either jaw, though it is most common in the lower jaw. Lower dentures can be secured with two implants at the front of the mouth, while upper dentures typically require at least four implants.

Implant-supported Bar Attachment Dentures

This option uses dental implants as a foundation for removable dentures – generally four in each jaw. Those implants are topped with a thin metal bar that follows the contour of the gum ridge. That bar attaches to fasteners – generally clips – on the underside of a specially-designed and removable denture.

Bar attachment dentures can be used in initial dental restorations – immediately following tooth loss – to avoid the loose denture problem altogether. In many cases, they can also be used to replace traditional dentures in patients who, after years of denture use, can no longer obtain a proper fit.

This implant-based restoration offers greater stability than conventional dentures. Because replacement teeth are a solidly anchored to the jaw, the implants act as artificial tooth roots. Since the implants offer protection against bone loss, they will not loosen over time – better preserving oral function and structure. While these dentures do present some adjustment issues, such as getting used to the new bulk in one’s mouth, the secure foundation of dental implants results in greater bite force and chewing efficiency, making learning to eat well with these dentures simple.
Permanent, or screw-retained dentures, are the option that most closely resemble natural teeth. This dental restoration is done by placing between four and eight dental implants in the jaw to hold a complete arch of replacement teeth. These replacement teeth are left in place 24 hours a day and can only be removed by your dentist. They are cared for like natural teeth as well, with regular brushing, flossing, and professional check-ups.

Advantages of this restoration include a more natural-looking smile and more comfortable and efficient eating. Permanent dentures are frequently used as the initial dental restoration following tooth loss or as a replacement of troublesome conventional dentures. In addition, they typically do not cover the roof of the mouth, nor are they as bulky as traditional or bar attachment dentures. In fact, they feel and function much like natural teeth, allowing patients to enjoy greater variety of foods.

The bottom line is that there are a number of treatment options available for people who suffer total tooth loss. Whether you're just losing your teeth or lost them years ago, there is no reason to settle for the reduced quality of life that comes with the inability to enjoy sitting down to a great meal with family and friends.

If poor dental health or ill-fitting conventional dentures have made those small but essential life pleasures difficult for you, a consultation with Dr. Lee or Dr. DeFelice, our oral and maxillofacial surgeons here at Cumberland Surgical Arts, can offer the solutions you need to get back to eating the foods you want with ease and enjoyment.

To discover how to revolutionize the way you eat, schedule a dental implant consultation with Dr. Lee or Dr. DeFelice.