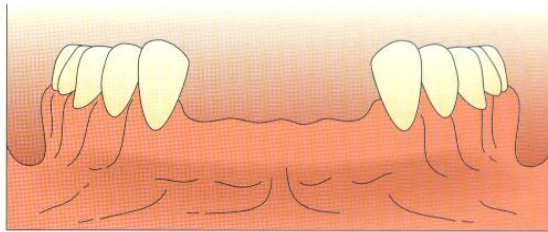


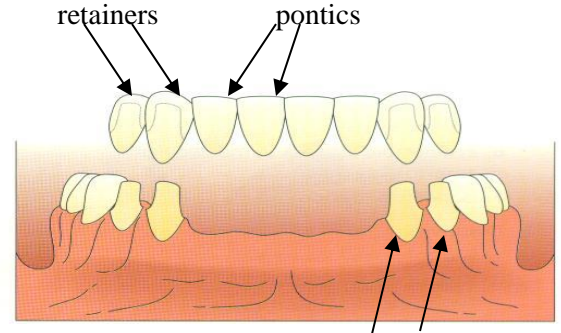


FIXED BRIDGES VERSUS IMPLANTS: A COMPARISON

A.



B.



abutment teeth

What is a fixed bridge?

A fixed bridge (typically known as a bridge) is an appliance to replace missing teeth. Picture A shows a person with 4 missing lower front teeth. Picture B shows an 8-unit bridge being lowered onto 4 shaped teeth (abutment teeth) to fill in the space: it has 4 retainers (crowns to act as anchors), and 4 pontics (the teeth suspended from the 4 retainers).

Why would I want a bridge instead of implants?

There are two main reasons:

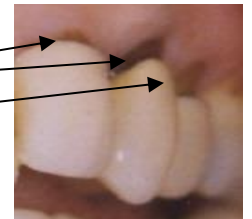
1. Expense: If you have insurance, your out-of-pocket expenditure will be less with a bridge than with implants. Without insurance, the expense for the bridge is usually equal to or less than implants.
2. Shorter amount of time to complete treatment.

What are the disadvantages of fixed bridgework, compared to implants?

There are many!!!!

1. Esthetics: Over time, your gums may shrink away from the bridge, and become dark. Also, you may develop defects in the teeth and bone underneath the pontics, which also is unesthetic. See the photo here:
2. Cutting of teeth: Picture B shows how 4 teeth were cut to accept the bridge. Implants do not require this preparation.
3. Recurrent decay: You are still susceptible to decay with bridgework. Cavities can form underneath the retainers, where you have natural teeth. If the cavity gets large enough, your bridge can fail, and not necessarily be remade. You may lose MORE teeth!
4. Risk of root canals: The 4 abutment teeth may still be vital (alive). When you cut on a live tooth, there is always insult or injury to the nerve: you risk needing future root canals.

Receding gums /
worn abutments



- continued -



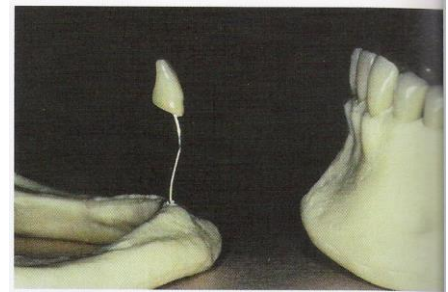
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5. Loss of bone: The bone in your jaw has one major purpose: to support teeth. When teeth are lost, the bone will continue to shrink and disappear. There is nothing in the bone underneath the pontics of a bridge: you will continue to lose bone. Implants actually help to preserve bone: they mimic the roots of teeth, so the bone remains to help hold them in place.



The picture on the left shows how the lower jaw shrinks over the years when teeth are missing.² The picture on the right shows where a tooth was before severe bone resorption occurred.²

6. Risk of periodontal (gum) disease: The bone loss described above is gum disease: loss of supportive structures of teeth. With increased bone loss, there is greater risk of damaging and losing the abutment teeth.
7. Replacement issues: The average lifespan of a bridge is 10 years. Some reasons for failure are recurrent decay, porcelain fracture, and need for root canals. When a bridge needs to be replaced, the whole thing needs to be removed. You are risking tooth fracture and root canal treatment. On the contrary, if something needs to be replaced with an implant, it usually is the portion above the gum: the implants remain untouched in the bone.

Here are some statistics of bridges versus implants for a single missing tooth¹:

- Estimated mean life span of a bridge at 10 years is 50%. An implant is above 97%.
- The most common reason for bridge failure is decay (cavities). An implant cannot decay.
- 15% of bridge abutment teeth require root canals. With implants, adjacent teeth are not affected.
- Abutment teeth of bridges are at risk of failure: 8-12% fail at 10 years, and 30% fail at 15 years. Again, there are no abutment teeth with an implant.
- 80% of teeth adjacent to a missing tooth have either no restoration or a minimal restoration. A bridge requires drilling on these teeth, while an implant leaves them untouched.

References:

- 1: Misch, Carl E: Contemporary Implant Dentistry, 3rd Edition, pages 6-7.
- 2: Misch, Carl E: Contemporary Implant Dentistry, 3rd Edition, page 10.

Additional resources: 1. WebMd: <http://www.webmd.com/oral-health/dental-health-bridges>
2. Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dental_bridge