



WHY BOTHER REPLACING MISSING TEETH?

If a person loses a front tooth, you can bet they'll get to the dentist quickly: who wants to walk around with a hole in their smile? When it's a back tooth, quite often people feel differently: "Oh, its just a back tooth. No one can see it." For many years you probably won't notice any changes. However, a whole cycle is progressing very quietly. Read below to see what happens....

Let's say you had all your teeth (picture A), but then lost a lower first molar (picture B).

You've actually lost two teeth. Obviously the lower molar, but also the molar above it: its not chewing against anything now!

In turn, you are now chewing with fewer teeth, which increases the stress on them, making them more susceptible to fracture. You'll also probably start favoring the opposite side to chew, since there are more teeth on that side. This, too, will increase the stress on the remaining teeth.

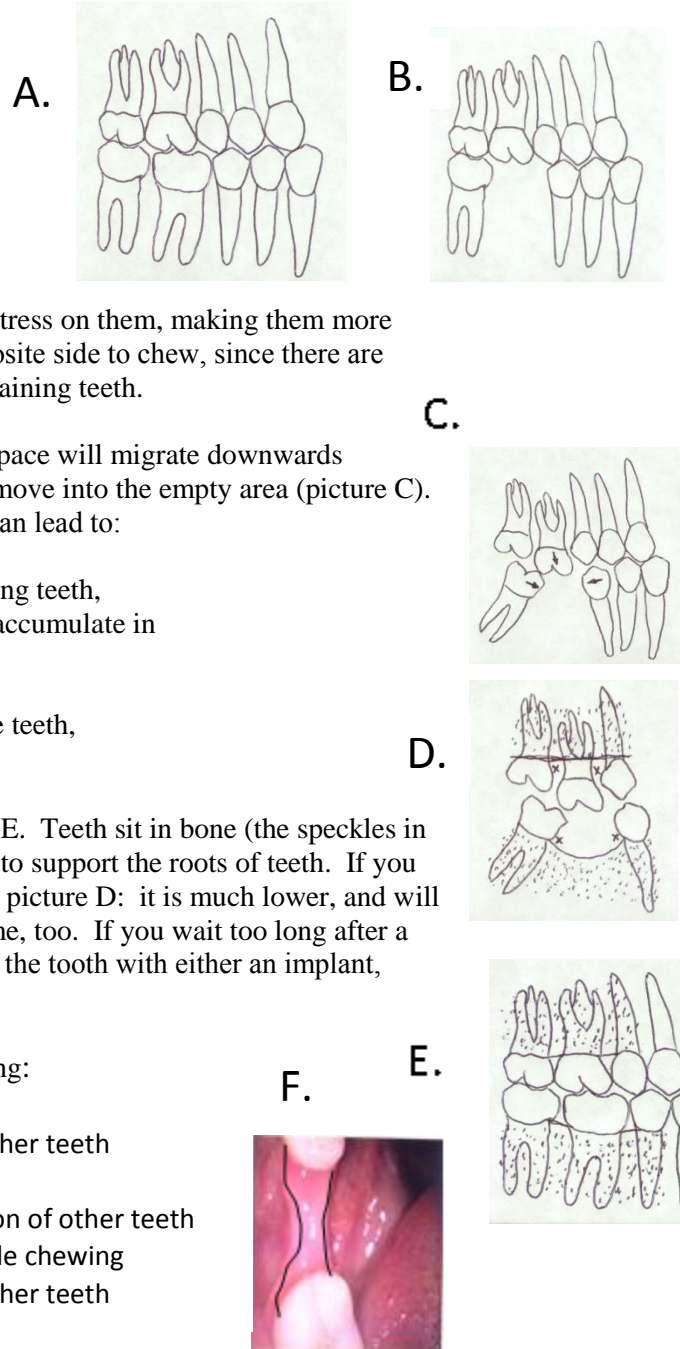
At the same time, teeth are beginning to shift. The tooth above the space will migrate downwards (hyper-eruption), and the teeth in front of and behind the space will move into the empty area (picture C). This now becomes a "malocclusion," which means a "bad bite." It can lead to:

- damage to the jaw joint (TMJ) from unbalanced forces,
- drifting of other teeth as they lose contact with their opposing teeth,
- periodontal (gum) problems because food and plaque will accumulate in newly created spaces (see "x's" in picture D),
- sensitivity from root exposure on teeth that have drifted,
- additional cavities in hard-to-reach areas at the necks of the teeth,
- and eventually additional tooth loss.

Another serious problem that develops is bone loss. Look at picture E. Teeth sit in bone (the speckles in the picture represent bone). Bone in the jaw has one major purpose: to support the roots of teeth. If you lose a tooth, you start to lose bone. Look at the height of the bone in picture D: it is much lower, and will continue to shrink. Picture F shows how narrow the ridge can become, too. If you wait too long after a tooth is lost, you may need to "bone graft" the area, before replacing the tooth with either an implant, bridge, or denture.

In summary, replacement of missing teeth will help with the following:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unesthetic missing teeth • TMJ / jaw problems • Periodontal (gum) problems • Additional tooth loss • Tooth sensitivity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cavities on other teeth • Bone loss • Hyper-eruption of other teeth • Uncomfortable chewing • Damage to other teeth |
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