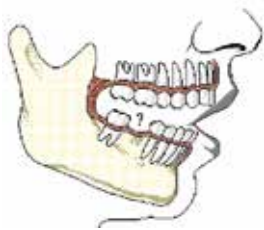


Bridge That Gap

Your teeth were designed to work as a unit. Just as an arch of brickwork will fall if a single brick is removed, so the dental arch begins to collapse if a missing tooth is not replaced. The remaining teeth become overloaded and begin to breakdown. Bridgework can prevent the collapse of the dental arch and protect the remaining teeth. Chewing ability, speech and appearance can improve dramatically.



What is a dental bridge?

As the name implies it is a fixed structure spanning space. A missing tooth is replaced by a false tooth that is firmly anchored to crowns constructed on the teeth either side of the gap. The whole assembly is called a bridge. It is cemented in place and once there cannot be removed by the patient.

What does bridgework involve?

Before a bridge is considered, your remaining teeth must be in the right position and capable of supporting a bridge. A dental bridge needs strong teeth as "foundations" on either side. If the support teeth are heavily decayed or the gums are diseased, the dentist will fix these problems first.



The procedures involved are similar to, but more involved than, those used to make a crown. In the previous diagram the teeth have been prepared to receive the bridge. An impression will be taken and a temporary bridge constructed. A technician will make the permanent bridge.



Once made the bridge is tested for fit. When correct the bridge is cemented into place. Minor adjustments may have to be made to the bite. The bridge is now completed.



Types of bridges

There are many different types of bridges. The two most common are outlined below.

Conventional Fixed Bridge

In the conventional bridge (illustrated above), full crowns (caps) are placed over the supporting teeth. Replacement teeth are fused to the crowns.

Maryland Bridge

The Maryland Bridge requires little tooth preparation of the supporting teeth. The replacement tooth or teeth is bonded to the supporting teeth with a special resin. This avoids extensive preparation to teeth which may otherwise be healthy. A Maryland bridge cannot be applied successfully to all situations and advice on this can be obtained from the dentist.

How Long Will it Last?

The major causes of bridge failure are decay and gum disease. Both are caused by plaque, a sticky film of bacteria and carbohydrate that forms on teeth every day. To maximise the life span of your dental work, plaque must be removed daily with brushing and flossing. How long your bridge lasts will depend on you keeping a clean mouth, avoiding a high sugar diet and having regular dental examinations.

On average a bridge lasts 12-15 years. Regular dental visits enable your dentist to monitor your oral health and to correct any developing problems, before extensive treatment becomes necessary.

How Much Will it Cost?

Whilst the precise amount will vary with the type and nature of your particular case, the initial cost of bridgework is higher than ordinary fillings. This is because it is very time consuming to produce bridgework. Materials are expensive and they are all hand made by a dental ceramist. A deposit of half the fee is taken on the first visit, with the balance payable on the final visit.