

My dentist has told me I can have a bridge to replace a missing tooth. What exactly is a Bridge?

- A bridge is where one or more missing teeth are replaced by using adjacent teeth to support them.

Is there an alternative?

- Sometimes implants can be used instead, either as individual units or to support bridges in their own right. It is also possible to use a removable partial denture.

What are the advantages of a bridge?

- It is fixed which means that it is strong for chewing and does not have to be removed for cleaning. It is made by a specialist dental technician to ensure a strong accurate fit and is colour matched where porcelain is used to mimic natural teeth. It tends to look and feel much more lifelike than a denture.

Are there any disadvantages?

- A bridge relies on the support of one or more adjacent teeth, so these have to be strong with a good life expectancy. Future damage or loss of the supporting teeth means that the bridge will be affected too and may be lost or altered.

How are bridges made?

- Usually by preparing the adjacent teeth for crowns. These form the 'abutments' supporting the bridge, which is made in one or more parts and cemented onto the prepared teeth. The design depends upon the number of teeth present and their position. In general, smaller bridges (2 or 3 teeth) are more successful than bigger, longer span, bridges.

What are they made from?

- Bridges are usually made from ceramic fused to metal substructure. The metal gives strength, accuracy of fit and rigidity whilst the ceramic part looks like natural tooth tissue. They can also be made in all-ceramic materials when suitable conditions prevail. Gold is also used and is very strong and durable although aesthetically not so pleasing.

Can anything go wrong?

- If bridges are well designed and made then they can be very successful and last for many years. However, they do require major alteration to the supporting teeth and this is irreversible. These teeth can then be the source of problems themselves in the future, for example, if decay or gum disease develops in and around them.



What is the best method of replacing missing teeth?

- Most people would say these days that dental implants are the best way of putting fixed teeth back into gaps. Because of their reliance on other teeth bridges are now seen as a less desirable option to implants. They do still have their uses however when implants cannot be used and they can be very effective. Dentures still have a role because they often rely much less on the preparation of adjacent teeth and the complications this can give rise to.

What should I have?

- There is no right or wrong – just different choices in different situations. Your case is unique to you and all options should be considered before you decide on the best way forward for you.

