

Repair or replace damaged teeth

A functional set of teeth is important as it affects appearance, the ability to speak clearly and the way one eats, writes **Kasmiah Mustapha**

DAMAGED or missing teeth can lead to various problems. Without a functional set of teeth, a person's appearance, ability to speak clearly, as well as the way he eats will be affected.

Loss of teeth or edentulism and damage to teeth occur for a variety of reasons, including periodontal (gum) disease, tooth decay and trauma. Causes of trauma include motor accidents, falls and sporting injuries. Even biting down too forcefully on a chicken bone can result in chipped or cracked tooth.

A missing tooth can cause adjacent teeth to drift or rotate. Unnecessary strain is also placed on remaining teeth, often resulting in cracked teeth. Similarly, excessive strain on the temporomandibular joint as a result of missing teeth can disturb the biting position of teeth and cause joint pain.

As edentulism has an effect on how we eat, it can also determine what we eat. Studies have highlighted the correlation between edentulism and nutritional status.

Clinician-in-charge at International Medical University Healthcare's Oral Health Centre, Dr Hussein Al-Wakeel, says the link between edentulism and nutritional status can be seen in the elderly, many of whom avoid foods that are difficult or painful to chew. As a result, they suffer from an imbalanced diet.

"Older persons end up choosing soft foods that are easier to chew rather than food based on nutritional value! This will lead to malnutrition," he adds.

While it is common in the elderly, edentulism also happens in younger people such as athletes who sustain injuries on the playing field and children who are brought in with injuries caused by accidents at home, school or playground, or from tooth decay caused by poor oral hygiene.

In younger people, missing teeth have a visible effect on their appearance. Less widely known is the fact that edentulism can also impair pronunciation and alter the



Restorative dentistry can repair and replace damaged or missing teeth. PICTURE DESIGNED BY PROSTOLEH / FREEPIK

way a person talks.

Missing teeth can also lead to psychological issues such as low self-esteem and low confidence, which can have long-lasting effects on quality of life.

RESTORATIVE DENTISTRY

Fortunately, the repair and replacement of damaged or missing teeth can be done with restorative dentistry including fillings, veneers, crowns (also known as caps), bridges, dentures and implants. The wider range of available options has made it easier for people to find a solution that

matches their needs and budget.

Fillings are suitable for small cavities; the decayed material can be removed and the tooth cleaned and filled.

Veneers are replacement of the visible outer layer of the tooth. A crown is a dental prosthetic that is placed over a damaged tooth to restore it to functionality. A bridge fills a gap between teeth by placing an artificial tooth in the gap and joining it to the adjacent teeth.

Dr Hussein says dental implants have become a popular option for tooth replacements as they are often more effective than conventional dentures or bridges in achieving the look and feel of natural teeth.

Artificial tooth roots made of titanium are surgically implanted into a person's jaw bone, and a crown is then attached to them. A complete denture can also be anchored with implants, possibly with as few as two. The result is greater stability when chewing and talking.

Implants also help to preserve the bony structures of the jaw and prevent the facial muscles from atrophying due to a person's inability to chew.

Ultimately, the most important thing is

to ensure that the chosen restorative solution achieves the desired objective, whether it is to help chew food, regain confidence about appearance or improve clarity of speech.

Ill-fitting dental prosthetics or unsuitable solutions are not only ineffective, they can also cause further injury. Ill-fitting or damaged dentures, for example, can cause mouth ulcers, which can again, adversely influence a person's choice of foods.

Even with the numerous solutions offered by restorative dentistry today, patients should take proactive steps in preventive care. Except in the case of trauma, edentulism can be prevented with basic steps such as brushing twice a day with a soft-bristled brush and flossing regularly.

"Regular visits to the dentist along with prompt treatment of dental disease is also important to prevent progression to the point of tooth loss. Smokers are more likely to get gum disease compared to their non-smoking counterparts. So, if you're a smoker, talk to your dentist about how to quit or reduce the number of cigarettes you smoke," Dr Hussein says.

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Dr Hussein Al-Wakeel