

# REBECCA BOARDMAN, D.D.S.

COMPREHENSIVE RESTORATIVE DENTISTRY

## COMPLETE and PARTIAL DENTURE CARE

New complete dentures often feel awkward at first. Soft tissues of the mouth that may have been open or uncovered by a previous denture are now covered. This strangeness, although bothersome, is a temporary problem which usually resolves during the adjustment period (generally 2-6 weeks).

Patients often state that their relatives or friends had no problem getting used to their dentures and could chew well from the first day. This may be because, once their dentures become second nature, patients forget about the difficult adjustment period. The ability to function with complete dentures involves learned neuromuscular skills that take time to develop. Although the time required may vary, and depend upon such factors as the quality of the remaining ridges, all new denture-wearers will require an adjustment period.

Because the new artificial teeth may be placed in slightly different relationships and the plastic denture base may feel bulky, speech patterns are often temporarily affected. The muscles of the tongue, lips and cheek must learn to coordinate movement to allow for normal speech. The learning process can be enhanced by practice. Reading aloud is one way to minimize the time required to recover normal speech patterns. Continued difficulty should be brought to our attention.

**SALIVA.** A normal response of the body to new dentures is increased salivary flow, caused by the glands trying to wash out the "foreign body." This situation may persist for several weeks but usually subsides within a few days.

**EATING.** It will take practice to eat a fairly normal diet with new dentures. A soft diet is recommended during the first several days to allow us to eliminate potential sore spots with a minimum of discomfort and to make the learning period more tolerable. Avoid tough, hard and sticky foods until you become more accustomed to your dentures.

Although some experienced denture patients can return to eating a normal diet (including apples, salads, and corn on the cob), this is often the exception. Most denture-wearers will find some restrictions in the foods they can manage.

Some points to remember regarding eating and chewing habits:

- 1) Eat slowly and cut food into small pieces.
- 2) Although the normal tendency is to chew on either one side or the other, denture wearers may function better by chewing with food on both sides over the back teeth at the same time. This helps to prevent tipping of the dentures.
- 3) Avoid, when possible, bringing the lower front teeth forward and against the upper front teeth to cut or incise foods. This protects the delicate upper front ridge and prevents tipping of the dentures.
- 4) If it is necessary to bite using the front teeth, try spreading the tongue against the back of the upper denture to keep it in place.
- 5) Try to chew vertically (up and down) rather than horizontally (side to side).

**SORE SPOTS.** New dentures almost always cause some sore spots to develop. These must be relieved during the first couple of post-insertion adjustment appointments. We recommend eating soft foods until the initial sore spots are eliminated. The best home treatment between appointments for sore spots is to rinse out the mouth with warm salt water.

**WEARING DENTURES AT NIGHT.** The healthiest policy with new dentures is to remove them for at least 6 hours a day to allow the soft tissues to breathe and recover. For most patients, the most convenient way to do this is to remove the dentures during sleep. While out of the mouth, the dentures should be soaked in either water or a denture-cleaning solution. Such a practice will maintain healthy oral tissues, preserve the ridges and underlying bone, and allow the dentures to fit properly for a longer period of time.

**DENTURE ADHESIVES.** It is our opinion that denture adhesives may sometimes lead to unfavorable tissue changes, compromise oral hygiene, and create a false sense of security by allowing patients to continue to wear ill-fitting dentures. The use of adhesives should not be necessary for a normal denture patient and should not be used as a substitute for development of proper-fitting dentures.

**CLEANING.** Any commercial denture cleanser can be used; please ask us for the names of the best currently available. Dentures should be thoroughly cleaned daily with a *denture brush and cleaner*. It is the meticulous brushing that is most effective in removing bacterial plaque and stains. Do *not* use toothpaste, as it is abrasive and will scratch the denture. A home cleaning solution for dentures that do not contain metal components can be made from 1 tbsp. Clorox and 2 tbsp. Calgon Water Softener dissolved in a cup of water. If a white, hard, chalky tartar or calculus forms on the denture, soaking it overnight in a solution of 1/2 vinegar and 1/2 water may soften the deposits enough to permit removal by brushing.

Caring for the oral soft tissues is also important. A soft toothbrush or washcloth should be used to scrub the tongue, gums and roof of the mouth. Warm salt-water rinses in the morning and evening are also recommended.

Do not use hot water to soak the plastic denture, as it may result in warpage. Warpage may also result from the denture being exposed to dry air for long periods.

**RECALL APPOINTMENTS.** Periodic recalls are advised to evaluate the dentures and examine the remaining soft tissue. Generally, these visits should occur once a year.

**POLICY ON ADJUSTING AND REPAIRS.** Although there are no guarantees on medical and dental treatment, we will provide whatever adjustments are necessary for a period of six months following delivery. Repairs related to any laboratory defects will, of course, be provided without charge.

**LONGEVITY.** No dentures are meant to last forever. Six to eight years is the average life span of a well-made appliance. Generally, the denture will require a reline every couple of years to maintain an ideal fit.

**PARTIAL DENTURES.** Partial denture patients may follow many of the same guidelines outlined above. Some additional pointers:

- 1) Do not use a Clorox-based cleaner.
- 2) Do not "bite" the appliance into place, as this may loosen or break the clasps.
- 3) Avoid biting against the upper front artificial teeth, as these may break rather easily.

**IMMEDIATE DENTURES.** If dentures are inserted the day the teeth are removed, remember to leave them in place during the first 24 hours. Follow normal post-extraction recommendations. Immediate denture patients will be scheduled for an adjustment appointment the day after delivery.

**OVERDENTURES.** Dentures made over the roots of teeth left in the ridges require extra care. Remember to use fluoridated toothpaste to clean the gums around the remaining roots and the teeth themselves. Fluoride rinses are helpful in preventing new areas of decay. More frequent recalls may be necessary to treat the remaining teeth.