

Snap On Denture in a Day...

One great thing about being a general dentist is the variety. On any given day, we perform an assortment of procedures that vary from thinking through a toothache and relieving pain, to giving people the perfect smile they've always wanted. Of all the procedures that I do, I would have to say that dental implants are probably the most rewarding because they have a tendency to change patients' lives for the better. Giving people teeth where they have been lost or securing a pesky, loose denture both tend to make patients very happy. I take pride in doing a perfect filling on an upper back tooth, but it just doesn't have the same effect.

Recently, I had a patient come in to have her denture secured with dental implants. What we can do is insert implants into areas where there are no teeth and then put attachments into a denture or partial so that it "snaps" securely into place. The implants anchor the denture so that it doesn't shift around while eating or talking. This patient had seen somewhere that we could make her denture snap into place in a few short hours. Sometimes we can. Unfortunately, in her case, this was not quite true.

Under ideal circumstances, we can make a denture or partial denture snap into place on implants all in one day. I've done it many times and it truly is a great treatment. Patients call back the next day with all sorts of good things that they can now eat. Sometimes, though, we have to wait a little while and let the implants heal before we use them. This also applies to using implants to replace lost teeth, but that's a story for another day.

So what do we look for in trying to decide how fast your implants can be used? As always, the research and opinions vary, but here are my personal loose guidelines:

Your Existing Denture or Partial – How old is it? What kind of shape is it in? Is it worn down? How does it fit? Do you like the shape and color of the teeth? Does it have room for the attachments? Can we put the implants into sites that will work well?

Often, one or more of these questions leads us into making a new set of teeth before we put in dental implants. A masterpiece is always easier to design on a fresh canvas. Sometimes, a brand new denture or partial will fit well enough that we do not even need implants after all.

Your Bone – The stronger the bone where the implant is placed, the better our chances are for immediate success. We often find this out while placing the implants. Most dental implants are designed to be screwed into the bone (*Note: You bone has no nerves in it so post operative pain is almost nonexistent.*) and we can "feel" how strong the bone is when we put them in. Also, the lower jaw is almost always better than the upper jaw.

How Many – The more implants we can put in the better. Multiple implants can share the stress that you place on them while chewing and tend to hold up better. The number that we can put in is generally dependant on anatomy and how much bone we have to work with. The more implants we have, the better I feel about putting them to use the same day.

These are just a few of the things that we look at when deciding if we can give you "teeth in a day" versus waiting for your body to heal a little bit. I certainly understand when patients say that sooner is better. If we can, we will, but I also want your implants to serve you longer than shorter.

Until next time, keep smiling. Have a prosperous and happy 2009.

-Comments can be sent to Drs. Parrish at ParrishDental@aol.com.