

The Onlay Way to Fix a Tooth...

Fourth of July barbecue...old Uncle Eddie performed a less than perfect job of removing the olive pits in the pasta salad. On your second bite, you hear a loud crunch and out comes an olive pit, a piece of your tooth, and some old silver mercury filling. Assuming these are not Aunt Millie's famous "secret" ingredients, you now have a dental situation to deal with.

For simplicity reasons, let's assume that the tooth is pain free and you can get in to your dentist the following week. Two x-rays of the tooth are taken, at different angles, to evaluate the extent of the damage. Today is your lucky day. It appears that no root canal will be required, but something will have to be done to replace the missing tooth and the old filling. An onlay is the restoration of choice and we can get started right away. After finding out that "this won't hurt a bit" and that your insurance will pay for everything (remember, this is a totally unrealistic made up story), your only question is, "What the heck is an onlay?"

A dental onlay is a restoration that replaces a missing piece of tooth. Imagine a three dimensional jigsaw puzzle piece that can be glued on and into your tooth. A bit like a game of *Tetris* for the dental lab that fabricates it. Onlays are more conservative than caps or crowns, but stronger and longer lasting than fillings. They can be esthetic (made of tooth colored plastic resin or porcelain) or they can be made of gold for added strength and durability. Either way, they tend to be stronger and longer lasting than conventional fillings.

The process of having an onlay placed is almost identical to that of receiving a cap or crown. On your first visit, the tooth is reshaped and any old cavities or fillings are cleaned out. Everything is smoothed out and shaped to certain specifications determined by your bite and the material (tooth colored or gold) to be used. An impression of the prepared tooth is taken and a temporary plastic onlay is placed. At your second visit, the temporary is removed and the lab made restoration is chemically bonded to your tooth. Two visits and you are back in business. Just try to stay away from that pasta salad.

Until next time, keep smiling.

-Questions or comments can be sent to Drs. Parrish at ParrishDental@aol.com