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Brighter Smiles

A DENTURE IS NOT A DENTURE

A denture is a denture is a denture is a denture. Many wonder if or how there could be difference between dentures. I have often gotten the same question about other disciplines of dentistry such as crowns, etc. This week I would like to focus on what makes different dentures different.

Wikipedia defines dentures as, “prosthetic devices used to replace missing teeth, and which are supported by surrounding soft and hard tissues in the oral cavity.” Wikipedia goes on to say the following about dentures:

“The fabrication of a set of complete dentures is a challenge for any dentist, including those who are experienced. There are many axioms in the production of dentures that must be understood, of which ignorance of one axiom can lead to failure of the denture case. In the vast majority of cases, complete dentures should be comfortable soon after insertion, although almost always at least two adjustment visits will be necessary to remove sore spots. One of the most critical aspects of

dentures is that the impression of the denture must be perfectly made and used with perfect technique to make a model of the patient's edentulous (toothless) gums. The dentist must use a process called border molding to ensure that the denture flanges are properly extended. An endless array of never-ending problems with denture may occur if the final impression of the denture is not made properly. It takes considerable patience and experience for a dentist to know how to make a denture, and for this reason it may be in the patient's best interest to seek a specialist, either a Denturist or a Prosthodontist, to make the denture. A general dentist may do a good job, but only if he or she is meticulous and usually he or she must be experienced.”

It is true that fabrication of dentures is a challenge. If the techniques taught in dental school are the only techniques used, the outcome will be mediocre at best. Dentures that are advertised for \$395 will give you just that, a \$395 piece of plastic with things that remotely resemble teeth.

Wikipedia is correct in stating that the impression is the key for a successful denture. However, simply taking an impression of the tissues in the oral cavity is not enough to produce a high quality, precision fitting prosthesis. Using a technique called a functional impression produces a far superior product over conventional techniques. The functional impression does take much longer to produce and must be done by someone who has been trained in the procedure and in experienced.

Other differences of a custom denture vs. a conventional denture are the materials and laboratories used to produce the product. Dental laboratories must be equally trained in

the functional impression technique. In addition, the quality of the materials, including the teeth themselves, play a huge role in producing a denture that not only fits meticulously but also looks natural and life-like. Staining of the “gum” portion of the denture, by a laboratory trained and qualified to do so, adds an even more a life-like appearance which far surpasses any conventional technique. Despite what Wikipedia says, a denture made with this technique rarely needs any adjustments and will fit well for years.

I have not discussed the optional role of using dental implants to secure dentures in this column. That is for another column another day. If you are in need of a denture, or if your existing dentures are ill-fitting (i.e. you need glue to hold them in), ask your dentist about the functional impression technique. It makes a world of difference.

Dr. St. Clair maintains a private dental practice in Rowley dedicated to health-centered family dentistry. If there are certain topics you would like to see written about or questions you have please email them to him at jpstclair@dentalhealthforlife.com. You can view all previously written columns at www.dentalhealthforlife.com.

