

Complete denture

Complete dentures are worn by patients who are missing all of the teeth in a single arch (i.e., the maxillary (upper) or mandibular (lower) arch) or, more commonly, in both arches, upper/maxillary and lower/mandibular alike.

The stages for a standard complete denture are as follows:

1. Primary impressions. Similar to taking them for a partial denture, except this will involve using a different type of tray to accommodate the fact that there are no teeth. Zinc oxide eugenol, impression compound, alginate or silicone materials may all be used depending on what the dentist prefers. The key here is to get the full extension of where the denture will sit in the impression and this may involve modifying the borders first with something called greenstick to make sure your muscles attachments are nicely recorded. I like to wipe alginate all up inside the lips and cheeks to stop air bubbles- gets a bit messy but gives a good impression.

2. Secondary impressions. These may not be needed if the stock tray and first impression is good enough. If it isn't, a special tray that fits the individual shape of your mouth will be requested from the lab and a new impression taken- this is called the master impression and it will be poured up to make a model of your mouth on which the complete denture will be made. When taking impressions the dentist needs to mold the impression to the muscles of your cheeks, tongue and lips. To do this they will gently pull and massage them whilst holding the tray down and ask you to stick your tongue out and from side to side. They may ask you to purse your lips, say 'ooooh' and 'eeeh' and swallow. There are times when modifications to the techniques may be needed e.g. for a flabby ridge.

3. The bite. If you only have all your teeth missing in one arch the process is slightly simpler and a combination of the description here and the one for partial dentures is used. What I am about to describe is for complete dentures on the top and bottom- it is one of the trickiest things to get exactly right in dentistry. Because you have no teeth, you have no natural biting position so we have to use the only reproducible position you have- RCP which I explained. Here we will use two wax bite blocks to record how you close your jaw together and give the technician, the necessary information to set up your teeth. This includes:

(i) The amount of lip support. We don't want too much support so that you look as if have a fat lip, or too little so that your lip creases up, making you look older.

(ii) The position of your teeth.

- The central line

- The biting surfaces of your teeth ('occlusal plane')

- How much tooth will be showing in relation to the lip- this decreases with age because of facial changes and tooth wear.

(iii) The height of your dentures (called the occluso- vertical dimension or OVD) – too tall and it will put stress on your muscles and not allow you to relax and close properly, too small and you will overclose, causing creases in your face and the potential for angular cheilitis.

4. Try in. See- Partial denture- try in stage. It is not uncommon to have more than one try in appointment to get things right. The dentist may take off or reposition some or all of the teeth in the process, and send the denture back to the lab to be re-set. Now is the time to make comments about the size, shape and colour of your teeth because once they are finished they are finished. Only when you and the dentist are both happy should the denture(s) be finished in acrylic. Don't worry too much about the suction at this point- wax doesn't grip well at all compared to acrylic so they often drop a little at this stage.

5. Fitting. So you finally have the denture or dentures to take home with you! I bet you didn't think it was such a long and involved process- helps you appreciate the cost a little more doesn't it! See- Fitting a partial denture for more details.

6. Aftercare. The dentist will discuss how to care for your dentures and maybe provide you with some written instructions to help jog your memory – it can be difficult to take it all in at once.

