

# *Al Dente*: Tighten Loose Dentures

By Dr. David Leader

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Full dentures are artificial teeth that replace the bone, gums and teeth that people may lose over time. Nobody expects an artificial hand to look, feel or work as a natural hand. Patients often expect plastic models of teeth to allow patients to appear, speak and eat as well or better than the real thing. While dentures make work very well for many, they will never feel or work exactly like real teeth. Fortunately, there are many techniques available to improve dentures' fit and effectiveness.

Many denture wearers find that over the counter denture adhesive products help their dentures feel more secure. Powders like Super Wernet's and Fixodent, work best for well fitting newer dentures. Apply powders by wetting the denture. Shake off the excess water. Sprinkle on the powder adhesive. Then, shake off the excess powder, and insert the denture. Powder adhesives are easy to apply and not as messy as other adhesives.

Dentures that do not fit as well demand a thicker adhesive material – pastes like Polident and Fixodent. Begin by applying pastes in a bead inside the deepest part of the lower denture, and around the edge inside the upper denture. Then, experiment to find where paste is best used and how much.

Sea Bond, adhesive impregnated paper cut to fit the underside of the denture. Sea Bond works well for older dentures and is comparatively easy to clean away. Sea Bond and pastes may cushion dentures over sore areas to allow healing.

Full denture wearers, people who have no teeth, should continue to see their dentist once or twice every year. Their dentist will screen for infections and for signs of oral cancer. More commonly, the dentist will notice signs of changes in the fit of the denture. Dentures rest on tissue that covers the alveolus. The alveolus is the bone that holds the natural teeth in place. As the natural teeth are lost due to accident or disease, the supporting bone, the alveolus, begins to shrink away. Over years of denture wear, the alveolus may completely dissolve away. Dentures that once fit tightly and worked well no longer stay in place. What can dentists do to tighten up loose dentures? Plenty.

How well do the upper and lower dentures line up? Occlusion refers to the way the teeth bite together. Poor occlusion is a common reason for dentures to shift while chewing. Imagine that the front teeth meet early or that the left teeth hit before those on the right. This kind of biting problem can dislodge a denture when chewing. Sometimes, the dentist can adjust the bite by shaving away selected areas to even the teeth. Sometimes, the patient needs a new set of teeth to correct this problem.

How closely do the dentures fit the patient's gums? When teeth are lost, the gums do not stay the same shape forever. Edentulous (tooth free) gums change shape over time. The first set of dentures may become quite loose in only a few months. The denture will be unstable, because there are spaces under the denture. Relining the denture fills those spaces with the same acrylic that the denture is made of.

When the alveolus becomes very small, even a well fitting denture may be loose. There are many techniques that dentists use to help patients whose gums have shrunk the point that even well fitted dentures are loose and uncomfortable. One technique allows the dental lab to line dentures with a layer of suction cups. The underside of suction cup dentures looks like the underside of an octopus tentacle. Another system allows the dentist or the dental lab technician to add a pair of one way air valves to dentures. Sucking air out through the valves tightens loose dentures. Both of these comparatively inexpensive systems allow dental professionals to alter preexisting dentures so that they will be more stable.

State of the art dentists use dental implants to fit permanent snaps into patients' jaws. Dentures that snap onto implants give patients the most comfortable, most secure dentures that have ever been available. People who wear this kind of denture find that they are able to eat, speak, sneeze, and laugh with confidence.

There is nothing wrong with using denture adhesives to make dentures feel tighter. If these products do not provide the necessary security, speak with your dentist at your next checkup. Only your dentist is able to help you choose the best technique to make your dentures feel their best.

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