

## What happens when you lose a back tooth?

When a back tooth can't be saved by root canal, or the patient refuses to save it and opts to have it removed, the removal of the tooth is not the end of the story. Many people think that, from an aesthetic viewpoint, a back tooth doesn't really matter. However, that is far from the truth.

The loss of a back tooth can have a significant effect on one's appearance. First, the teeth will shift when the missing tooth is no longer available to help support the others. One outer sign of this change inside the mouth is the appearance of pouches on the sides of the jaw. In addition, a sinking or puckering may become obvious in the area between the cheeks and the mouth. Lips may come to look thinner and straighter across the face rather than turning up in a natural arc. All these changes can have a drastic effect on the patient's appearance—especially as he or she ages.

Fortunately, this doesn't have to occur. Often, a root canal can save the tooth in question, avoiding these problems completely. However, if a root canal isn't possible, a bridge can be used to keep the teeth functioning properly and maintain their stability. A fixed bridge helps retain the patient's natural bite, prevents drifting of the teeth, delays the occurrence of periodontal disease, and keeps the surrounding teeth in their natural positions. In some cases, implants may be the treatment of choice. In addition to all this, the cosmetic changes that might have appeared if the space had been left unfilled won't occur. We think that will leave you looking better and smiling more brightly for a long time to come.



Some people neglect to visit us because they have healthy teeth. They think to themselves, *"My teeth are in good shape...I keep them clean... maybe I'll go in once in a while for a cleaning, but I don't need regularly scheduled checkups, right?"*

Regular appointments with us are about more than just clean teeth. For instance, when you visit us, we always check for signs of oral cancer. Finding a precancerous lesion early on can mean preventing full-blown oral cancer. In fact, about ten percent of patients exhibit suspicious lesions that could be oral cancer. This disease often appears as a small spot in the mouth. It is generally painless, flat, and may be red or white. If the spot looks the least bit suspicious, a

painless brush biopsy is performed to discover whether any cancerous cells are present. In a very small number of cases, a scalpel biopsy may need to be done using local anesthesia.

In addition to seeing us for regular oral cancer checks, you can help to prevent oral cancer by avoiding substances that are known to cause the disease. These include tobacco (cigars, cigarettes, pipes, and chewing tobacco) and alcohol. Avoid excessive sun exposure as well, since this may be a factor in lip cancer. Watch for signs such as changes in color inside your mouth, tenderness, changes in your bite alignment, lumps, rough spots, or sores that don't heal. Report anything unusual to us.

## Feelin' dry?

Some medications can make your mouth feel like a desert. Whether it's blood-pressure drugs, anti-histamines, or antidepressants, that cotton-mouth feeling can be miserable. In addition to how it makes you feel, it also can increase the likelihood of developing a cavity. How can you whet your whistle and save your teeth?

Whatever you do, don't reach for the hard candies. Sure, they'll increase saliva production, but they'll also get those bacteria working away to produce the acids that can break down enamel. Instead, grab a glass of water or a bottle to take with you. Sip all you want. If that doesn't do the trick, rinsing your mouth with water can sometimes provide relief. Occasionally, reach for a sugarless hard candy. This combination of remedies should do the trick to keep your mouth watering and hold bacteria at bay.

