

# 3 FROM HEAD TO TOE

## for Denture Wearers

### Having a Healthy Mouth is Important at Any Age

If you wear partial or complete dentures, it is especially important to take good care of your gums and any natural teeth, and to keep your dentures clean and properly fitted.

When gums dentures and remaining teeth are not cleaned properly, you are likely to experience a build-up of plaque, a type of bacteria that collects at the gum line and can harden on teeth into deposits called calculus. Too much plaque can lead to bad breath, cavities, gum disease and further tooth loss. In recent studies, gum disease has been linked to other serious health conditions such as heart disease and stroke, diabetes and respiratory illnesses such as pneumonia.

If you have dentures, or are about to get them, here's what you need to know to keep your mouth healthy and your smile bright...

### About Your Dentures

When properly fitted and cared for, dentures will enhance your appearance and can be worn with confidence as you enjoy your favourite activities. A simple, daily routine of oral care and regular visits to your oral health care professional are all that is needed to keep you on track.

It is important, however, to remember that dentures do not last forever. Even with proper cleaning and care, the average life span of dentures is only about five to seven years. The teeth and base of the dentures will eventually stain, and over time, natural changes will occur to the structure of your face and mouth that will require an adjustment to your dentures.

Like natural teeth, dentures can build up with plaque. Dentures can cause plaque to be pushed further down underneath the gum line, which may make cleaning more difficult and lead to cavities, especially on exposed root surfaces.

Wearing dentures can put extra pressure on the surrounding bone structure and gums, as well as

any natural teeth that are used to support partial dentures. If these areas are not kept clean, you may experience sore, irritated gums or additional bone and tissue loss. That is why it is particularly important to see your oral health care professional regularly and follow their advice between visits.

### Regular Check-Ups

Your dentures and tissues should be checked every year to prevent or reduce tissue inflammation and to minimize bone or tissue loss.

If you are already a denture wearer, or about to have dentures fitted for the first time, you may wish to consult with a denturist. Denturists are denture specialists who design, construct, insert and adjust dentures. Visits to the denturist are covered on most major dental insurance plans.

### Visiting your Denturist

At a check-up, your denturist will check to make sure your dentures have not become loose. Overtime, changes to the tissues, wearing of the teeth and discolouration of the materials will affect the comfort, fit and appearance of your dentures.



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If necessary, your denturist will adjust or replace the denture so that you are more comfortable. All denture work is done right at the denturist's clinic, so adjustments can usually be made while you wait.

Having your dentures professionally polished can help make dentures look like new. This cleaning step takes only a few extra minutes at the denturist's office, but can help restore the glossy finish of your dentures and eliminate tough stains. Polishing is usually needed once or twice a year, or as recommended by your oral health care professional.

Generally, an annual check-up with the denturist is recommended. If you are experiencing sore gums, pain, difficulty chewing, bad breath, or if your dentures feel loose, don't wait – book an appointment right away.

## Visiting Your Dental Hygienist

Visiting your dental hygienist on a regular basis is one of the most important steps you can take to maintain or improve your oral health. This is what you can expect from your dental hygienist if you are a denture wearer:

1. He or she will start by reviewing your medical history with you to make sure there are no medical conditions that could influence your treatment.
2. The next step is assessing the condition of your head and neck region, followed by your tongue, gums, natural teeth and other areas of your mouth, paying special attention to the areas that support the dentures to check for abnormal areas or rubbing. Any areas of concern will then be referred to the most appropriate oral health care professional or physician.
3. You are then ready to have any remaining natural teeth cleaned (called "scaling") to remove hardened or calcified plaque build-up. This is done using hand instruments or a vibrating ultrasonic instrument.
4. The dental hygienist or denturist may use a mechanical denture cleaner to remove any stubborn build-up of plaque from your dentures.
5. Your natural teeth may be polished to remove stains. If needed, you may receive a fluoride treatment to strengthen them, or other treatments to de-sensitize the teeth – especially the teeth next to the dentures.

Based on the condition of your dentures, natural teeth and supporting tissues, your denturist and dental hygienist will recommend an oral health care plan just for you.

## Between Visits

Although your personal oral health care program will vary according to a number of factors, and should be developed together by you and your oral health care professional, there are some general guidelines you can follow between office visits to control plaque build-up and extend the life of your dentures:

### After Every Meal

- Rinse and brush dentures and natural teeth after every meal. Brush dentures inside and out using warm water and a mild soap or denture toothpaste.
- To brush natural teeth properly, place your brush at a 45 degree angle to the junction between the tooth and gum, applying gentle pressure as you move the brush away from the gums.
- Gently brush your gums, tongue and the roof of your mouth with a moistened, soft bristle brush to stimulate circulation, tone gum tissue and clean your mouth of bacteria.
- Use a denture brush to gently brush your dentures. Denture brushes are stiffer, but have soft bristles that are angled specifically for use with dentures. Be sure to brush all surfaces, and pay extra attention to the spaces between "teeth" and the areas that come in contact with your gums.
- When brushing or rinsing dentures, use a half-filled basin of water or hold a damp towel underneath to cushion the shock in case they're dropped.
- If you are in a situation where complete cleaning is not possible after a particular meal, be sure you still rinse both natural teeth and dentures with water. While the dentures are out, use your tongue to rub the sides of the supporting natural teeth.
- Rinse your mouth frequently with water throughout the day to keep it free of bacteria and freshen breath.

### Daily

- Floss between natural teeth and/or stimulate your gums, as recommended by your oral health care professional.

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- To floss, wrap a length of floss around your middle fingers until you have a two-inch length between them. With the thumb and forefinger of each hand, guide the floss gently between each tooth, using a back-and-forth motion. Curve the floss around each tooth in a “C” shape and gently guide it up and under the gum line.

## Overnight

Dentures should be taken out daily and soaked for several hours or overnight. This not only keeps dentures clean, but gives the supporting tissues in your mouth a chance to rest. Removal is recommended before bed or during private time such as while bathing.

- Rinse and brush your natural teeth and dentures to remove all bacteria, plaque and debris.
- Soak your dentures overnight inside a covered container filled with a denture cleaning solution using tablets or paste. The solution will help loosen and remove stains and deposits.
- Your oral health care professional may recommend that you use an appliance such as an electric denture cleaner or oral irrigator in combination with soaking to help loosen unwanted particles from your dentures.
- Rinse your dentures in warm running water again after soaking, and brush natural teeth, before putting dentures back in your mouth.

## Cleaning Aids

There are many different cleaners, solvents, brushes, toothpastes, gum stimulators and appliances on the market to help make cleaning your mouth and dentures easier and more effective. Your oral health care professional can advise you on which ones to try and how to use them properly, but here are some overall tips:

- Use a toothpaste containing fluoride to protect natural teeth against cavities.
- For hard-to-remove stains, soak dentures occasionally in undiluted white vinegar.

- Use a clasp brush to remove plaque from the inside surfaces of denture clasps. Hold the dentures carefully to avoid accidents.
- Do not use cleaners that can scratch and remove the surface of dentures.
- Never use bleach to clean or soak your dentures – it can weaken the denture’s structure and discolour the acrylic.

## Your Denturist and Dental Hygienist

Dental hygienists and denturists are important members of the oral health care team. Your dental hygienist provides professional treatment and advice to help prevent gum disease and dental cavities, as well as to support and promote total wellness.

In Ontario, all dental hygienists are registered with the College of Dental Hygienists of Ontario (CDHO), and all denturists are registered with the College of Denturists of Ontario (CDO). These organizations regulate their professions under the Regulated Health Professions Act (RHPA) to ensure the public receives safe and effective care. All practicing dental hygienists have been educated at a post-secondary dental hygiene program.

Watch for this pin, worn by Ontario’s dental hygienists.



**References:** available upon request.

**Acknowledgements:**

Denturist Association of Canada

**For more information about your oral health and dentures, contact your oral health care professional.**