



Why use Dental Implants with Dentures

By Dr. Walter Warpeha, Jr.

When teeth are lost, denture wearers experience both soft tissue and bone loss which is usually ongoing and detrimental to appearance and function. Hence, in many cases it is only a matter of time until full dentures are prescribed. Once bone is lost, denture fit is permanently compromised.

While these tissue changes often stabilize in the upper mouth, the effect is greater in the lower jaw where continuing bone loss is seen on x-ray for twenty years.(1) By using dental implants, tissue changes in the jaws have been shown to be reduced (2) or bone can actually be stimulated. (3) Even with only minimal implant support, all aspects of lower denture performance were enhanced in a multi-center ten year study.(4)

A noted authority, Dr. Carl Misch, is a clear advocate of multiple implants for bone preservation. By using his concept of biomechanical sections of the jaws, implant placement in key arch positions are required to absorb the forces that would otherwise contribute to bone loss. He states the minimum for this purpose is three implants in the mandible and five in the maxilla. (5c)

The lower is often the more difficult denture and implants can produce dramatic improvements. A conventional upper denture can work better when an implant-enhanced lower is made more stable improving chewing and enhancing comfort. Implant support of an upper denture is still possible but many people do not find that it is an improvement over a well-made denture.(6)

Dental implants can be used to hold a single denture (usually 2 or 3 implants) or completely support the denture (usually 3 or 4 implants.) With 4 to 6 implants the replacement teeth can be locked in and the denture can be eliminated. Fewer implants, of course, reduce the total cost but may limit some of the benefits that the patient can enjoy.

An appropriate level of treatment is a trade-off between costs and benefits. Dr. Warpeha is especially helpful in finding the exact treatment that gives you what you feel is important while keeping the treatment manageable and affordable.