

A Better Thanksgiving Meal...

By the time this article gets into print, most of us will be in the early stages of preparing a Turkey Day feast. Ham, turkey, stuffing, gravy, and all of the other traditional sides that will leave us in a food induced coma well before the Aggies and Longhorns tee it up Thanksgiving night. Personally, food, family, and football are three things that are close to my heart and I look forward to Turkey Day each year.

It seems like every couple of weeks we see a patient who is fed up with their teeth. They come into our office and want to know about having all of their teeth removed and dentures made. In some cases, this is their best treatment option. In most cases, though, I recommend that people try to keep as many of their own teeth as possible, as long as possible.

Dentures are almost always a last resort, not a cure all. No matter who your dentist is, we cannot ever truly replace what God gave you. With the newer materials, we can make an esthetically beautiful set of dentures or plates as they used to be called. The real problem with dentures is that they look so much like natural teeth that people expect them to work like natural teeth. This just isn't so. Studies have shown that a set of dentures chews about fifteen percent as well as a set of natural teeth. Fifteen. To put that into perspective, about eighty-five out of your one hundred favorite foods will be very difficult to chew with a denture. That's just no fun.

So what can be done to make things better? Generally, the true problem that people have with false teeth is that the bottom denture does not stay in place very well. This is because there is an annoying piece of tissue, sometimes called the tongue that constantly seems to be moving the floor of your mouth up and down. Add to that a much smaller surface area of the mandible (lower jaw bone), as opposed to the maxilla (upper jaw), and you can see why lower dentures are a nightmare for most people.

There is some good news to all of this. We now have a way to retain that annoying lower denture, called dental implants. To make a long story short, implants allow people to snap their teeth into place and keep them there. They can be used on the top and bottom to help hold things where you want them, though most people just need them to retain their bottom denture. If your existing denture is in relatively good shape, you can often add implants and attachments without having to make a new denture. In a lot of cases, it can all be done in one appointment. Walk in with a loose denture and walk out with one that snaps in. It truly is one of the more rewarding things that I do for people.

As with any cutting edge treatment, cost is everyone's first concern. Assuming someone has no insurance benefits and a denture that is in good shape and would not have to be remade, you would generally be looking at two to five thousand dollars to place the implants and attach one denture. Please be warned that this can vary greatly depending on what type of implants and attachments are used and how many are needed to do a good job.

By the time this comes out, it will be too late to snap that denture in by Thanksgiving. If you hurry, though, you can chew better by Christmas brunch. Until then, keep smiling. May you all have a blessed and happy Thanksgiving.

-Questions can be sent to Drs. Parrish at ParrishDental@aol.com.