

## Ed and Ted...

As dentists, we are extensively trained to fill holes. When we see a cavity, we want to clean out the bacteria and fill the hole that was there. When we see a missing tooth, we want to fill the space with a new tooth. Heck, I even spend a good bit of time kicking dirt into the holes my son puts into our driveway with his toy tractors. He calls them "swimming pools for little tiny people," but this drought has made them a bit more like booby-traps for when Jennifer and I jog. As usual, I digress...

The bottom line is that nobody has ever died from not replacing a missing tooth. Quality of life (being able to eat, talk, and smile confidently) is another matter altogether. Why is your dentist so interested in filling those holes where teeth used to be? The reasons are many, but let's illustrate a few with a little story about a fictional set of twin brothers, Ted and Ed.

Ted and Ed both experienced severe gum disease at an early age, let's say thirty, and lost all of their teeth. At this point, they had two options. The far more time consuming and expensive option was a full mouth of dental implants and a set of teeth on top of them. The quicker, cheaper option was a set of conventional dentures that rest on the jaw bones where the teeth once were. Let us assume that both Ted and Ed were healthy and had enough bone to support the implants, as well as the means to pay for them. Sometimes, finances and/or lack of insurance can dictate treatment, so we'll assume Ed and Ted could afford the treatment they needed...if they wanted to. They consulted with their dentist and decided to have the procedures done together.

Mind you, Ed was a little more compulsive than his brother, Ted, and was sometimes accused of being a bit short sighted. On the way home from their consult, Ed happened past a tractor dealership and a shiny new model caught his eye. After a quick talk with Sammy Salesman, Ed was on his way home with a pretty new toy. The implants would have to wait. For now, he would just get some dentures because that's what Daddy had anyway.

Ted was a little more focused and went through with all of his desired treatment; a full mouth of implants and the teeth to go on top of them. He got his teeth back. No plastic dentures for Ted. No taking them out at night to clean them. Ed would constantly complain about loose dentures and not being able to eat some of his favorite foods, but his complaints were usually relieved by a ride through the pasture on his air-conditioned tractor. Ted was happy and Ed got used to what he had chosen.

Fast forward thirty years and you would not even believe that Ed and Ted were twins. Ted is a vigorous man, often mistaken for fifteen years younger than he is. Ted's implants have required routine maintenance, but they are all still there holding his teeth and bone in place. Ed, on the other hand, looks a bit older than his sixty years. His chin appears too close to his pointy nose. His lips are a bit thin and his wrinkles outnumber Ted's ten to one. Ed likes to brag that he is on his fourth set of dentures and he has still yet to spend as much money as his brother did that one day thirty years ago. Ted just smiles and points to his shiny new tractor. Ed's tractor no longer runs and is rusting behind the barn.

The bones of your upper and lower jaw are there for one main reason...to hold your teeth. If you start to lose teeth, you start to lose the bone where those teeth were. In other words tooth loss leads to bone loss and bone loss leads to what happened to poor Ed...premature aging of your facial structure. That's one of the many reasons why we like to fill those holes as soon as possible. Remember, it's never too late.

Until next time, keep smiling.

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