

Everything changes...

Your teeth are adrift in a sea of bone.

At this point, I've either gotten your attention, thoroughly confused you; or you have turned the page. Assuming that we do not have severe gum disease, we all think of our teeth as fixed into one place. They are surrounded by bone after all. Although teeth do not really feel like they are constantly moving around; your teeth are always on the go. Look at a picture of Grandma when she was twenty-five and compare it to now. I'll bet you that her teeth aren't lined up the same (unless she had the same denture then as now or a permanent retainer). Look at someone who had braces and quit wearing their own retainers. I'll bet those teeth are not as straight as the day the brackets came off. Whether we like it or not, our teeth are and will constantly be shifting around. That's okay. Teeth need exercise too.

In general, each tooth in your head wants two partners to make it happy. Insert politically incorrect polygamy joke here. Each tooth in your mouth strives for an opposing biting partner, as well as a tooth in front of it to snuggle up to at night. If these are not available, your teeth will shift around until they find some stability within the framework of your bite that makes them happy. Once stable, they will continue to shift over time, usually so slow and so little that we do not notice it. That's an overview of how our teeth position themselves over our lifetimes. There are evolutionary reasons for all of this, but that's a whole other article.

So what does this mean to all of us on a day to day basis? Actually, it affects us all in some way.

First, the fact that teeth can move is what allows us to perform modern orthodontics (braces). Using slow, steady forces, we can move the teeth and the bite to a healthy, stable position. In this way, we can prevent, as well as solve, an array of jaw joint problems. Opening up your bite to the correct position can also lengthen your lower face and make you look younger. Most patients are all for this treatment side effect.

Most likely, every one of us will lose a tooth sometime in our lives. Whether the culprit is trauma, gum disease, or decay, a lost tooth can cause issues. When a single tooth is lost, the teeth next to and opposing the empty space start to shift around to find their own "happy" places. This shifting can lead to other problems with the surviving teeth, such as gum disease, food traps that cause cavities, and a closed down bite that can injure your jaw joints. It is true that nobody has ever died from NOT replacing a single tooth, but lost teeth sure can cause a domino effect of problems.

Until next week, keep smiling.

-Questions and comments can be sent to Drs. Parrish via their website: www.ParrishDental.com.