

Common Causes of Tooth Loss

Tooth loss can occur for a variety reasons, of which some are under a person's control and some are not.

Congenital Absence

It is not uncommon for a tooth or teeth to be congenitally absent. This is a tooth of teeth that never develop, so they never erupt into their "normal" position. Most commonly, the primary (baby) tooth is present, but there is no successor (permanent tooth) to replace it. Often this baby tooth will remain in place and will function until it fails due primarily to lack of root support.

Trauma

There are many causes for loss of teeth due to trauma. Teeth can be "knocked out" from a sports or bicycle accident, or it can affect the teeth in ways that do not show up until months or even years later.

Dental Diseases

The most common cause for tooth loss is gum (periodontal) disease. This is basically a localized infection in the gums and supporting tissues of the teeth leading to bone loss. This can progress to the point that the teeth either fall out or need to be removed. Dental caries (decay) can also progress to the extent that the teeth are non restorable and need to be removed.

Teeth may also crack or fracture in a way that can not be restored and necessitate removal. This can happen as the result of clenching and grinding habits, or for mechanical reasons from a poor bite.

Reasons for Replacing a Missing Tooth or Teeth

The benefits should be weighed against the risks of leaving the space, as well as resulting changes that may take place in the rest of the dentition.

When teeth are removed, the bone that supports the teeth tends to shrink over time. This process is called resorption, and this is a natural consequence of the loss of bone function in the area. The bone will lose both height and width from resorption. This sometimes leads to difficulty wearing a removable denture due to lack of an adequate "ridge" for stability. In the esthetic zone where loss of ridge volume can be visibly apparent, this can lead to a cosmetic defect. As the bone resorbs the gum shrinks away with it creating a defect that can be unsightly and promote food impaction under adjacent teeth.

Drifting of the teeth can also be a complication with the loss of teeth. The adjacent teeth to the area can lean over into the vacant space. Likewise, loss of a tooth or teeth can lead to shifting of the opposing teeth as they drift either up or down into the open space (super-erupt).

In general, teeth have a tendency to move towards the front of our mouths and towards the opposing jaw, unless they are stopped, usually by adjacent or opposing teeth. As teeth drift, they create discrepancies in the height and contours of the gum tissue and predispose adjacent teeth to periodontal disease progression and/or dental decay due to difficulty in cleaning these areas. Drifting teeth can also adversely affect the occlusion (bite), as well as cosmetics of the face and smile.