

## Enjoy Good Nutrition By Keeping Your Teeth!

Dr. Charles Mayo, co-founder of the world famous Mayo Clinic, is quoted as saying “People who keep their teeth live an average of ten years longer than those that lose their teeth.” What do teeth have to do with a long life?

Think about people and their relationship to food. Food, and the enjoyment derived from being able to eat well, increases as we age. Eating may be an afterthought to young adults. The taste, texture, temperature, and presentation of the meal are increasingly noted by people as we mature into middle age. By the time we are elderly it may be the highlight of our day.

What if dentally we can't enjoy that meal due to sore or missing teeth? What if we have to struggle to chew that food because even excellent dentures are poor substitutes for real teeth? And poor dentures are a real nightmare. Is nutrition going to suffer? Yes!

A recent article in the Journal of the American Dental Association discussed dental implications of “metabolic syndrome”- a combination of obesity, high cholesterol and triglycerides, high blood pressure, and high blood sugar. These people need to be exercising as well as eating a diet rich in fibrous fruits and vegetables. Studies have shown that maintaining the natural teeth are critically important for people with metabolic syndrome.

The reason is that as people progressively lose teeth, they will often alter their food selection. The fewer back teeth are present, the harder time they have eating a healthy diet. Instead, they tend to select foods that are softer and higher in saturated fat, transfatty acids, and cholesterol. Therefore they get less of the fruits, vegetables, healthy fats, carotene, folate, potassium, and vitamins C, E, and B6 that they need.

Along the same lines, studies show that more back teeth that people are missing, the greater the likelihood of having a high a Body Mass Index (being fat or obese). Again, food selection tends to change for the worse as more teeth are lost.

So, you may ask, won't dentures or partials correct this problem? Unfortunately the answer is no. The reason is that most people can't bite near as hard with dentures or partials because these sit on the soft gums. It is impossible to chew hard, crunch, firm or fibrous foods near as well as with real teeth.

So what are the solutions for this problem? Keep your teeth! Go see your dentist regularly. Realize that you will not be able to detect problems yourself until they are severe, whether cavities or gum disease. Brush and floss your teeth well. Avoid constant sipping or nibbling on sweet things.

If you are already missing some teeth, replace them, if at all possible, with implants or bridges. These are securely fixed into the bone or onto adjacent teeth so you can chew just as well as with natural teeth.

Finally, if you already have dentures or partials, at least make sure they have been relined within the last 5 years so they can work as well as possible, Much better would be to either replace them or support them with dental implants. These will greatly increase your chewing ability and help preserve your jawbone!