

What is a Prosthesis?

A prosthesis is a general term for replacement for a missing body part. In dentistry it is used as a general name for a single tooth or for several teeth and missing tissue. More than one prosthesis are prostheses (plural of prosthesis). The prosthesis can be a removable prosthesis or a fixed prosthesis.

Removable Prosthesis

Removable prosthodontics includes replacing missing teeth and tissue with a prosthesis that the patients themselves can take in and out of their mouth, such as complete dentures (which replace an entire arch of missing teeth) and partial dentures (which replace one or more missing teeth in an arch of teeth).

Fixed Prosthesis

Fixed prosthodontics includes replacing missing and/or broken teeth and tissue with restorations that the patient *cannot* take in and out, such as veneers, crowns, bridges, or an implant prosthesis, where an implant rather than a tooth/teeth has a prosthesis attached to it, like a crown.

Dentures are made to resemble natural teeth. There are three types of dentures and each are made to meet a specific need.

1. Fixed Partial Denture or “Bridge”

This prosthesis is permanently attached to healthy neighboring teeth, and spans the space between for missing teeth, hence the name “bridge”. It replaces missing teeth when surrounding teeth, bone and gums are healthy. A bridge can also be attached to implants rather than teeth. But implants and natural teeth are never connected.

2. Removable Partial Denture

This prosthesis is held in place with clasps that are attached to neighboring teeth. It replaces many teeth that have been removed. In some cases, implants can be used with an attachment placed in the implant and secured to the prosthesis with a “keeper” into the tissue side of the prosthesis.

3. Complete Dentures

Complete dentures are needed when all the natural teeth have been removed because of severe gum disease, decay, or other dental problems. These replace all the teeth in the mouth. They can replace either the maxillary (upper) teeth and/or the mandibular (lower) teeth. They can replace teeth as a set, or just one arch or teeth.

4. Hybrid Prosthesis

A hybrid prosthesis is a complete arch prosthesis that is attached to implants, usually through several holes/channels with small screws, that is secured to the implant or abutment, which are subsequently filled to seal them. An abutment is a piece, usually conical in shape, that attaches to the implant to allow several implants to secure the prosthesis.

If you have any questions about prostheses, please feel free to ask us.