

Did you know?



SADA
THE SOUTH AFRICAN
DENTAL ASSOCIATION

More than a gap in your smile

Losing a tooth is common - whether from decay, gum disease, or injury - but it is not something to ignore. Beyond affecting your appearance, a missing tooth can lead to functional and structural changes in your mouth and jaw over time.

Each tooth plays a role in maintaining proper alignment, bite balance, and jawbone health. When one or more teeth are missing, surrounding teeth may shift or tilt, changing the way your upper and lower teeth fit together. This can cause chewing difficulties, uneven wear, and even jaw joint discomfort.

The Hidden Effect: Bone Loss

Your teeth aren't just for chewing; they also help stimulate the jawbone. When you bite or chew, natural pressure is transmitted through the tooth roots, keeping the underlying bone strong and healthy.

When a tooth is lost, that stimulation stops. The bone beneath the missing tooth begins to resorb (shrink), and over time, this can cause your jawline and facial shape to change, giving a sunken or aged appearance.

In fact, bone loss can begin within a few months of tooth loss. The longer you wait to replace a missing tooth, the more bone volume is lost, which can make future replacement options more complex.

Replacement Options to Restore Health and Confidence

Modern dentistry offers several effective ways to replace missing teeth, each suited to different needs and budgets:

Dental Implants

- The gold standard for tooth replacement.
- A small titanium post is surgically placed in the jawbone to act as an artificial root.
- Supports a crown, bridge, or denture that looks and functions like a natural tooth.
- Helps preserve bone and prevent facial collapse.

Dental Bridges

- Ideal for one or more missing teeth in a row.
- Uses the neighbouring teeth as anchors for a fixed bridge.
- Restores chewing ability and appearance, though it doesn't directly stimulate bone like an implant.

Dentures (Partial or Complete)

- Removable replacements for multiple missing teeth.
- Affordable and non-invasive.
- Modern dentures are lighter, more natural-looking, and more comfortable than ever before.

Your dentist can help you decide which option best suits your oral health, bone structure, and lifestyle.

Why Timely Replacement Matters

- Delaying tooth replacement can cause several long-term issues:
- Bone shrinkage in the jaw
- Shifting or drifting teeth affecting your bite
- Difficulty chewing or speaking clearly
- Facial sagging and changes in appearance
- Increased strain on remaining teeth

By replacing missing teeth early, you help maintain proper jaw support, chewing efficiency, and a balanced smile.

Learn more about the link between oral and general health on the [SADA website](http://www.sada.co.za) at www.sada.co.za and [find a registered dentist near you](#).

Information supplied by The South African Dental Association

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