

FULL MOUTH RECONSTRUCTION

BY MICHAEL I. BARR, D.D.S.

PEOPLE ARE LIVING LONGER and keeping their teeth. A few decades ago, a significant number of people old enough to be members of the AARP had no teeth at all. Since then, developments such as fluoridated water, improved dental care, and increased public awareness have greatly reduced the number of people missing all of their teeth. Today, more people have more of their own teeth.

We can now fully expect teeth to last a lifetime, and given the longer expected service, there is an increased need for restorative services. Years ago, teeth were often lost before they had a chance to wear down. In contrast, today's dentists are seeing more patients with teeth that are serviceable but worn, cracked, chipped, or unattractive. Much of the Baby Boomer generation has had routine restorative treatment during their lifetime. Many have had a patchwork quilt of fillings, crowns, and bridges. Dentists are faced with not just replacing this older treatment as it wears out; they are tasked with restoring the whole mouth in many cases. Just as you replace all four tires on a car when they wear out, full mouth restoration or reconstruction can be thought of in the same manner.

Oftentimes, dentists see patients who present a number of very large fillings that have been in place for many years — sometimes decades. Teeth with large fillings have a tendency to develop cracks and fracture. These big fillings also tend to wear away leading to changes in the bite. Natural teeth may have worn flat due to years of use or nighttime grinding. Old crowns may no longer match the surrounding tooth color, have chipped porcelain, or may be showing dark metal collars down at the gum line. Some teeth may have drifted or become crooked due to spaces from missing teeth. Any of

these problems can contribute to discomfort, difficulty chewing or speaking, and an unappealing appearance. Worn teeth not only function less efficiently, they age us beyond our years. A restored smile cannot only improve basic life functions; it can improve our self-image, confidence, and reflect the youthful personality within us.

Typically, dental school education focuses on single tooth dentistry rather than full mouth dentistry. Accordingly, prudent dentists who wish to treat patients with comprehensive needs pursue intensive continuing education aimed at effective and predictable outcomes. Full mouth reconstructive dentistry often requires an interdisciplinary approach that may involve a team of dental specialists. This team may include any combination of a general dentist, orthodontist, periodontist, oral surgeon, endodontist, and prosthodontist. A well-versed general dentist may be capable of handling the majority of treatments in one office in some cases.

Comprehensive or reconstructive cases may involve multiple phases of treatment over an extended period of time. Treatment may include periodontal (gum) or endodontic (root canal) procedures to create a solid foundation for the restorative treatment. Implants may be included to provide replacements for missing teeth. After a foundation of health is established, the restoration will begin and may include a combination of crowns, veneers, bridges, and fillings. Treatment time may span anywhere from a few weeks to several months. Costs can vary from the cost of a big screen TV to a moderately priced new car.

Finding a dentist to suit your needs may require some footwork. It is often a good idea to get multiple opinions. Ask



about experience, credentials or additional training, and photos of actual cases. Make sure you are comfortable and all of your questions are answered before proceeding with treatment. And then imagine how 21st century dentistry can restore your smile, or even change your life, with incredibly natural and long-lasting results! ♦

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