

Is it OK to use denture adhesive?



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The supermarket and drugstore shelves are full of a myriad of products that promise to improve the retention and stability of dentures. Through the years, I think I have seen them all used at some time or the other for poorly fitting dentures and well-made dentures alike. However, I have observed that most people use denture adhesives improperly and for the wrong reasons. Adhesives really are not designed to "glue" dentures in place. Most of them are designed to serve as a spongy water reservoir to enhance the surface tension of saliva, which is only one of the factors in providing adequate retention in a denture.

Properly made dentures are retained by certain characteristics of saliva like the ability to stick together (cohesiveness) and the ability to stick to other objects (adhesiveness), the atmospheric

pressure of the mouth, the moulding of the soft tissues of the mouth around the denture, and stability of bite during chewing. If any of these are weak or lacking, a denture will feel loose, even if all of the others are present. Quality and quantity of saliva are affected by age, medications, overall health, diet, and various other factors. Since the characteristics of saliva are critical for denture retention, I have seen many patients over the years who were very disgruntled with their dentures that had appeared to have been made reasonably well. The problem usually is not the dentures or how they were made but the health of the individual patient. Adjusting the atmospheric pressure within the mouth is also dependent on each individual. Usually, a tapered ridge (called the postdam) is fabricated at the back of upper dentures. This ridge displaces fatty tissue at the junction of the hard and soft palate to create a vacuum to suck the denture to the roof of the mouth. Some people have very little fat in this area and very tight palatal tissues that reduce the ability of a denture to form a vacuum. The last two factors in denture retention are dentist-related. Proper impression techniques must be utilized, and appropriate post-insertion adjustments

must be made to permit the soft tissues to mould properly to the borders of the denture. Establishing a properly balanced and stable bite is usually the most challenging skill for dentists to master, and the requirements for each and every patient are very unique.

Assuming that a denture is properly fabricated, adjusted, and stable, denture adhesives may be needed if a patient has a very bony palate and/or is suffering from some form of xerostomia ("dry mouth"). Adhesives may also be appropriate for added security and comfort if a denture wearer is a public speaker, a musician, or a singer where the properties of saliva are likely to be compromised or when excessive movement may break the seal created by the soft tissues. In fact, some of my patients have asked me if they can use a little adhesive when they go out to dinner because it just makes them feel more self-confident. The answer is "certainly" because it is for the right reason.

However, many people use denture adhesives improperly. If a denture does not fit properly, adhesives simply make matters worse because too much adhesive is necessary to "glue" the denture in place. When adhesive is used, it should only be

used sparingly, smeared over the entire tissue surface of the denture in a very fine layer, and then soaked in water for at least ten seconds before seating the denture. Water activates the adhesive and allows it to work properly. Denture adhesives should never be used routinely if the dentures do not fit properly because damage to the edentulous ridges and soft tissues can occur.

If you are having problems with the fit and retention of your dentures, have a dentist who is skilled in denture therapy evaluate them. Sometimes, relining or rebasing is all that is necessary to improve the fit. In fact, most experts agree that dentures should be relined about every 2 or 3 years in order to compensate for soft tissue changes. However, new dentures may also be necessary to improve the stability of the bite.

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