

Does Dentistry Ever Fail?

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I get asked by a lot of people, “Why does the dentistry I’ve had done fail”? This is a great question because there are many reasons dentistry doesn’t last forever.

First of all, there is little made by man that does not wear out over time. Secondly, the mouth is a very hostile environment when it comes to tooth restoration and replacement.

Trauma to the mouth, a tooth being chipped or knocked out, leads to dental restorations and tooth replacements. Nashing, clenching or grinding of the teeth done subconsciously also aggravates the teeth. Misalignment of the teeth causes them to wear abnormally, while dental infection causes cavities and infection of the supporting structures resulting in material failure and tooth loss.

The first requirement of a long-lasting restoration is the absence of dental or gum infection. Gum infections do not cause restoration failure, but can cause the loss of the tooth itself. Dentists call this periodontal disease. My grandparents called it pyorrhea. It is one of the reasons your dentist wants you to come in on a regular basis. The dentist and/or hygienist probes the pocket between the tooth and the gum to make sure there is no bleeding or loss of bone. Dental infection that causes cavities is due to an organized colony of bacteria (germs) called a biofilm.

If your mouth is not disease-free, no dentistry will last long-term. If you do not have a lot of money to keep re-doing your dentistry, you may want to have less expensive dentistry done until the disease is under control. If you are an adult who continues to suffer from dental infection and cavities, you may want to try two things:

1. Brush and floss your teeth every night before you go to bed, rinse with water and then brush a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste on your teeth, then spit out the excess and leave the rest on your teeth all night.
2. Chew two pieces of xylitol gum three times a day. Xylitol is a sugar made from birch bark. It is very sweet but has a different chemical make-up that the germs in the biofilm cannot use to make the acid that causes the cavities in your teeth. You can get xylitol at most health food stores.

There are a wide variety of materials used in resorting and replacing teeth: plastic, porcelain, metal and a combination of any of these. All of them have their advantages and disadvantages. Some last longer, but don’t look as good. Some look better but are harder than the natural teeth and can cause abnormal wear. Some are less expensive, but do not last as long, do not look as good, or contain materials that are controversial environmentally. Some are less expensive but do not last over time if used in too large of a dental problem.

Porcelain is made of glass and like all glass if you pound on it hard enough it will break, so will the porcelain crowns in your mouth. The closer the porcelain crown is to the fulcrum (the jaw point) the more likely it is to break. Therefore, on the very back teeth metal crowns last longer. Crowns usually last longer than fillings because they are stronger. Silver fillings usually last longer than white filings on the back teeth. They are also the least expensive fillings we have. They also are dark colored so they don’t look as

good and are thought by some to have environmental issues. White fillings are made out of plastic. Plastic does not last as long on back teeth because they are plastic filled with ground glass. Any crowned tooth has a 10-20 percent chance of needing a root canal. Any root canal has a 3-10 percent chance of failing and needing to be redone.

I know this may seem technical and confusing. The real message is, ask your dentist what kind of materials he or she is putting in your mouth and why. Ask them how long they will last. If you have your dental disease under control, some kinds of dentistry will last more than 25 years, making it a good investment long-term.