

Denture Adhesives: A Guide for Patients

What are denture adhesives?

Denture adhesives are creams, powders, or liquids that have the ability to stick to the tissues (“gums”) under a denture as well as to the denture itself. This improves what dentists call the retention of the denture – its ability to hold on to the underlying tissues.

If my new denture has been made correctly, why might I need a denture adhesive?

Denture adhesives are NOT a substitute for an expertly designed and crafted denture. You may find you can function well with your new denture without the use of adhesives. However, research has shown that adhesives can improve the retention and chewing function of many dentures. You may have certain conditions that make wearing dentures more difficult, such as dry mouth, a stroke, or loss of some of the bone support for the denture. These and many other conditions can compromise the ability to function with even the best denture. Adhesives may offer some help.

Which denture adhesive should I use?

Over 200 million dollars are spent each year in the US alone for denture adhesives. Additional millions are spent on advertisements to influence your purchase. Advice from friends or relatives can be misleading as each person has unique needs. As a general rule, powders do not last as long as creams but are easier to clean off the gums and dentures. Pads and cushions are best avoided as they may alter the occlusion (“bite”) of the denture and lead to other problems. Your dentist is trained to evaluate your individual needs and offer the best advice for your circumstances.

How should the adhesive be applied?

Powders: The mouth and denture should both be cleansed and kept wet. Tap a thin layer of powder over the entire tissue side of the denture. Gently shake off the excess. Insert the denture and press in place for 5 seconds. Close your teeth together, swallow, and clench your teeth together tightly for 10 seconds. If you have a dry mouth, it may help to first coat your mouth with a saliva substitute or water before placing the denture on your gums.

Creams: Clean your mouth and denture well. Dry the denture. For the upper denture apply 5 pea-sized dabs of adhesive equally spaced to the side of the denture that contacts your gums. For the lower denture apply 3 pea-sized dabs. If you have a dry mouth, immerse the denture in cool water for 30 seconds to let the adhesive soak up moisture. Insert the dentures and press in place for 5 seconds with your fingers.

Close your teeth together, swallow, and clench your teeth together tightly for 10 seconds. If you have used the right amount, only a little should ooze out from under the denture borders. Over time you will find out just how much cream you need.

How should I clean out the adhesive?

It is very important for the health of your mouth to remove all the denture adhesive from your mouth and denture daily. Powders can easily be brushed from the denture using warm water. Powders can be removed from the gums with a soft brush and toothpaste. Creams are more difficult to remove. To remove them from the denture, scrub the denture under very warm water with a denture brush. If the adhesive is very hard to remove, it may need to be soaked overnight and then brushed. Another method is to scrub the denture with an electric toothbrush while the denture is immersed in a sink of warm water. To remove the cream adhesive from your gums, first hold hot water in your mouth to help soften the adhesive. Next, scrub with a washcloth wrapped around one or two fingers and moistened with hot water.

Why are regular checkups still important?

You may think that since you no longer have your natural teeth, you only need to see your dentist if you notice a problem. That is a dangerous myth. The supporting tissues under your dentures continue to change throughout the rest of your life. As the gums shrink, the denture and the gums become mismatched. This change happens little by little and is often not noticed by the denture wearer until significant damage has been done to the tissues, sometimes requiring surgery. Your dentist is trained to detect these changes and correct them early. You should only have to use a thin layer of adhesive. If you find you are needing to use more adhesive, you should see your dentist. Your dentist will also closely observe your tissues for signs of oral cancer which needs to be found early before you would notice that anything is wrong.