



## ***What happens when a tooth is removed?***

There is a special type of bone surrounding your teeth. This bone is called alveolar “ridge” bone, and exists solely to support your teeth. As soon as the tooth is removed, this bone begins to degenerate and “melt away.” This occurs in two dimensions. The first is loss of horizontal width caused by the collapse of the bone surrounding the socket. This makes the remaining ridge narrower than when the tooth was present. The second is a loss of vertical height. This makes the remaining bone less “tall.” This process is faster in areas where you wear a partial or complete denture.

## ***Why is it important to preserve the bone?***

You will have several choices of how you can replace the newly missing teeth. All of the options rely on bone support and bone contour for the best function and esthetics. Here is a list of the possible options:

- You may choose to replace your missing teeth with dental implants. These are root-shaped supports that hold your replacement teeth. The more bone support you have, the stronger the implant replacements will be. In some cases, the bone can degenerate to a point where implants can no longer be placed without having more complex bone grafting procedures to create the necessary support. Obviously, preventing bone loss is much easier than recreating the bone later.
- You may choose to replace the missing teeth with a “fixed bridge.” This is a restoration that is supported by the teeth adjacent to the missing tooth space. The replacement tooth (or pontic) spans across the space. If the bone is deficient, there will be an unsightly space under the pontic that will trap food and affect your speech.
- Other replacement alternatives include removable partial or full dentures. These often perform better with more supporting bone.

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