

Denture



The invention of the denture is an important milestone in the history of medical studies. It has brought good news to dental patients.

The history of the denture has come a long way. As early as 700 BC, the people in Etruscan, an ancient city in Northern Italy, had utilized gold to make the bridge of a denture; carved bone or ivory into a denture, and occasionally made use of the teeth removed from human mouths.

During the Middle Ages, dentists perceived that the worms among teeth were what caused the rotting and pain in teeth, thus eliminating the need for a denture. When Queen Elizabeth I was young, she had a missing front tooth which caused her facial muscles to sag inwards. To protect the Queen's image, she would stuff some cotton into her mouth whenever she appeared in public.

Near the end of the 17th century, only rich people had dentures installed in their mouths. Although the technology of denture installation was not advanced at the time, the price was extremely costly. Dentists would use a protractor to measure a patient's mouth before producing a suitable denture, and then tie the denture to the neighboring natural teeth. Nevertheless, to make a denture that perfectly fitted the patient was a difficult task. The denture not just kept coming off, but wearing it also brought as much pain as having a decayed tooth.



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Pierre Fauchard was a dentist who came from Paris, France. In the early 18th century, he became the first man to use wire to fix the denture so that the upper row of teeth would not fall off easily. However, the installed denture rarely fitted the patient. On top of that, traditional dentures made of ivory would produce a foul smell; or dentures made using bones or other organic materials would be corroded by saliva, after being used for some time. To get rid of the smell produced by ivory, George Washington, the first US President, would soak his denture in wine before sleeping every night.

Near the end of the 18th century, French dentists introduced dentures made of porcelain. A piece of porcelain could well protect both the upper and lower rows of teeth. Later, dental experts improved the denture into a single porcelain tooth which could be fixed separately on the gum.

During the 19th century, most dental revolutions happened in the USA. In 1844, American hardware businessman-cum-inventor, Charles Goodyear, invented a type of flexible rubber, named vulcanite. Vulcanite found itself in instant use in the fabrication of denture bases. The vulcanized rubber was hard, cheap and easy to process. The 'teeth' made by porcelain could fit nicely on the hard gum fabricated by vulcanite. This invention marked the beginning of the period of comfortable and durable dentures for everyone.



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Food for Thought:

- ❖ Demand leads to innovation or invention.
- ❖ Innovation or invention will not necessarily bear success in the first attempt. Improvement and innovation are essential to bring the invention to the next level.



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