

Oral Health Tips

Dental Implants

If you are missing one or more natural teeth due to injury, disease or decay, there is another restorative alternative — dental implants. Implants can be used to replace a single missing tooth, several teeth or all of one's teeth. While the cost tends to be greater, implants more closely resemble the look and feel of your own teeth. Not everyone is a candidate for dental implants, so start by talking to your dentist to help you assess your individual needs.

What Is a Dental Implant?

An implant is an artificial tooth root usually made from titanium. Unlike removable dentures or fixed bridges, dental implants are surgically "implanted" under the gum tissue into the jawbone.

Who Are Candidates for Implants?

- Generally, age is not a barrier if you are in good health with healthy gums.
- You must have proper bone structure in your mouth to support the implant.
- Some people with certain oral conditions, medical conditions or habits may not be good candidates for dental implants. If you are thinking about having a dental implant, consult with your dentist to see if you have any conditions or habits that would decrease the chance of dental implant success for you.
- For long-term success of the dental implants, you must maintain excellent oral hygiene habits and regular dental visits.

What Are the Advantages and Disadvantages of Dental Implants?

- An implant may offer increased stability because it fuses with the patient's own healthy bone, allowing the replacement teeth to feel more natural and some people find the fit more comfortable.

- People often choose dental implants because they may look more natural than dentures or bridges and feel more secure, allowing you to look and feel better about yourself.
- The cost for implants may be more than for traditional bridges or dentures. When used together with bridges, implants are more similar in look and feel to natural teeth.

What Is Involved With the Placement of a Dental Implant?

There are several steps involved in the placement of a dental implant, and these steps can vary depending on a number of factors. The process will generally start with surgery to place the anchor of the implant. Depending on the type of implant, the surgery will "implant" the anchor, in some cases with a post already attached that is used to connect the anchor to the replacement tooth. With other implants, a second surgery may be necessary to place the post. Once the implant has bonded with the jawbone and the gums have healed, an artificial tooth that looks like a natural tooth is made and attached to the post portion of the anchor. Treatment time varies depending

[continued on next page](#)

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[continued from previous page](#)

on individual needs but can take a number of appointments and may take up to nine months to complete.

What Is Involved in the Care of Implants?

Following the home care instructions is vital for a successful implant outcome. Your overall health may affect the success of the implant. Poor oral hygiene is the most frequent cause of problems and implant failure. It is recommended that following placement of an implant that patients' brush and floss around the implant as directed by their dentist. Some patients may require additional visits to the dentist for cleaning and examination of the gums to be sure the gums are healthy. All patients should follow the instructions provided by their dentist.

Is a Dental Implant Right for You?

Today, there are several options for restoring teeth due to periodontal disease, an injury or lost teeth: dentures, bridges, partials and now dental implants. Each option has various advantages and disadvantages. Dental implants may help improve your appearance, confidence and enjoyment of your favorite foods. Talk to your dentist about the procedure details of your own situation.

Sources: Academy of General Dentistry:
www.agd.org; American Dental Association:
www.ada.org