

DENTAL IMPLANTS FAQ's

Why do we need to replace missing teeth?

Our teeth are an important part of our digestive system as they are needed for chewing food. They also play a role in speech and they are an important part of our appearance, too. Finally, there will be no gaps and spaces between our teeth after losing a tooth.

Why have implants?

- Implants are an alternative to conventional bridges and partial dentures.
- If you find that your full dentures move around a lot, implants will help to anchor them in place.
- When teeth are lost, the jawbone may start to shrink. Implants can help slow this process down.
- Your dentist may recommend using implants to support a bridge rather than cut into healthy teeth either side of a gap.

What are the advantages over conventional replacements?

The conventional methods of replacing missing teeth are Bridges or Dentures.

Bridges usually involve sticking false teeth onto our existing teeth. This may involve filing down healthy teeth to act as retainers which may compromise the health of these teeth. Also bridges can only be provided when there are sufficient strong remaining teeth. Although they are called permanent replacement, they are likely to need replacement every 10 to 15 years.

Dentures are teeth attached to a plastic or metal plate. They can often be cumbersome as they have to be taken in and out every day for cleaning. They may not always retain well in place if the shape of the gums and bone in the mouth are not appropriate.

Though bridges and dentures can serve us satisfactorily, implants provide better support and usually result in more comfortable and stable replacement teeth. They provide better chewing efficiency and allow us to have permanent fixed teeth without trimming our own natural teeth for support, or having to remove the teeth every day. Implants also slow down the shrinkage of our jawbone which occurs as a result of tooth loss.

Who is suitable for dental implants?

If you have good general health then dental implants will almost certainly work for you. However, habits such as heavy drinking or smoking can increase the number of problems associated with initial healing and thereafter may negatively influence the long-term health of gum and bone surrounding each implant.

Remaining teeth might also be compromised making treatment planning less certain.

If you have any other complicated medical problems then speak to someone with relevant experience - it is rare to have health problems that prevent the use of dental implants.

Healthy, disease-free gum tissues are also necessary. The long term success of a dental implant depends upon keeping the gums and bone around the implant healthy.

People who have implants must keep them clean and should return to their dentist regularly for checkups, because any problems that might threaten the health of the implant must be corrected.

How many teeth can be supported by implants?

All the common forms of tooth replacement, such as bridges or dentures can be replaced by dental implants. If you are missing just one natural tooth, then one implant is normally all that will be needed to provide a replacement. Larger spaces created by two, three or more missing teeth do not necessarily need one implant per tooth; however, the exact number of implants will depend upon the quality and volume of bone at each potential implant site.

Occasionally, it is even possible to join natural teeth to implants with a conventional bridge. In the upper jaw, bone density is generally poorer than in the lower and if you have no teeth at all, most treatment providers will want to place a minimum of 6 implants to support a complete arch of 10 or more replacement teeth.

In the lower jaw, the bone towards the front of the mouth is often very strong and as a direct result, fewer implants may be needed than are required to treat a whole upper jaw. A simple treatment plan to provide 10 or more teeth in the lower jaw might be possible with as few as 4 implants, although it is still more common to use 5 or 6.

Are implants dangerous to health?

The materials used are almost never rejected by the body. Also, these have never been reported to cause cancer or any other life-threatening disease.

Can I take the teeth out if they are fixed to implants?

Most artificial teeth attached to implants can only be placed and removed by the dentist. However, if you have complete dentures fixed to the implants by bars, then you will be able to take them out for cleaning.

Do the implants show?

Your dentist will make sure that the implants will not show during all normal movements of the mouth and lips. You will need to be able to see them, so that you can clean them properly.

How much pain will I experience?

Usually minimal to none. While undergoing treatment, you will receive local anesthesia. You may have mild post-surgical soreness for up to 72 hours. An over-the-counter pain reliever will alleviate the discomfort for most patients.

How can I clean the implants?

Most implant-supported teeth can be cleaned around each supporting implant by brushing and flossing in just the same way that you would around natural teeth and tooth-supported bridges. In some areas special floss, interdental toothbrushes and other cleaning aids may be needed to maintain good oral hygiene.

Cleaning is not at all difficult, provided that you do not have impaired use of your hands.

It is reasonable to expect some of the daily hygiene procedures to be a little more complex than around your original teeth - equally, expect to spend more time with this than you may have done in the past if you wish to maintain optimum implant health.

What happens if the implant does not bond (integrate) with the bone?

This happens very rarely. If the implant becomes loose during the healing period or just after it, then it can easily be removed and healing takes place in the normal way. Once the jaw has healed, another implant can be placed there.

How long will the implants last?

The success of each treatment stage will be the main factor determining how the implants are performing.

Once the implants and surrounding soft tissues are seen to be healthy and the new teeth are comfortable and correctly adjusted, it is the quality of your home care and willingness to be present for regular maintenance reviews that will have most influence on how long they will last. When poorly cared for, implants will be covered with hard and soft deposits (calculus and plaque) which is very similar to what we can find on neglected natural teeth. Untreated, these deposits can lead to gum infection, bleeding, soreness and general discomfort, just as they can occur around natural teeth. It could probably be said that implants much like teeth will last for as long as you can keep them clean.

Well maintained implants placed into adequate bone can be expected to last for many years and probably for your lifetime. However, just as you would expect conventional crowns, bridges and fillings to need occasional repairs or replacements during their lifetime, your implant-supported teeth may also have similar maintenance requirements over theirs.

What can be done if you do not have enough bone?

Sinus lift - In the upper jaw above the back teeth, it is possible to increase the height of the bone available by creating new bone in the sinus. This procedure is called a 'sinus lift'. A skilled surgeon can deliver very predictable results in this location and without the general success of this technique many patients would be unable to have implants in a part of the mouth where teeth are so commonly missing.

On lay grafting - There are many ways of adding bone. One simple concept is to take a piece of bone from somewhere else and secure it as an 'on lay graft' to a deficient area. The new piece of bone will slowly join to the underlying region and when healed and mature, an implant can be placed in a more favourable position.

Where can you get extra bone from?

Bone can be harvested from posterior regions of the lower jaw. When you use your own bone to create new bone in another area of the mouth you will have to contend with the discomfort created by the donor site as well as the surgical site. Many people feel this is well worth any additional discomfort as your own bone is normally considered to be the 'gold standard'.