

DENTAL IMPLANTS

A treatment option for replacing lost teeth

Although research shows that more people are keeping their teeth into old age, there's always the possibility that a permanent tooth may be lost to disease or accident. If that happens, modern dentistry offers a number of treatment options that can help restore your smile.

Dental bridges and dentures have been used in restoring smiles for decades. But you also may have heard about a treatment option suitable for some patients: dental implants.

WHAT ARE DENTAL IMPLANTS?

Dental implants are metal posts that are surgically placed in the bone under your gums. During a healing period, the bone grows around the implant. Then a replacement tooth, or crown, is attached to the metal post, giving you a restoration that is a lot like your natural tooth. Implants also can be used to secure bridges and dentures when more than one tooth is missing.

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF DENTAL IMPLANTS?

Because the implants fuse to the jawbone and offer a secure base for the replacement teeth, some patients find this a comfortable option in restoring their smile. In many cases, implant-supported teeth may look and feel more like natural teeth.

CAN ANYONE HAVE IMPLANTS?

Healthy gums and bone are necessary to support dental implants.

Patients who want to have implants must commit to a meticulous oral hygiene routine, including flossing, brushing and regular dental visits to help protect the supporting tissues from any disease.

Because dental implant placement is a surgical procedure, candidates must be in good overall health.

Successful fusion of the bone to the implant requires good periodontal health, so people at higher risk of experiencing gum disease—such as those with diabetes or those who smoke—might not be good candidates.

WHICH DENTAL SPECIALIST PLACES IMPLANTS?

Implant placement is not a dental specialty. Often, a team of dentists—general dentists or specialists—will work together to provide different parts of the treatment. One dentist may perform the surgery to place the implant that goes into the bone. Another dentist may place the crown on top of the implant to complete the restoration. Some dentists are trained to perform all aspects of the treatment themselves. Either way, it's important that all members of the dental team work together for the best possible results, in consultation with you, the patient.

When looking for a dentist qualified to place dental implants, you should ask these key questions:

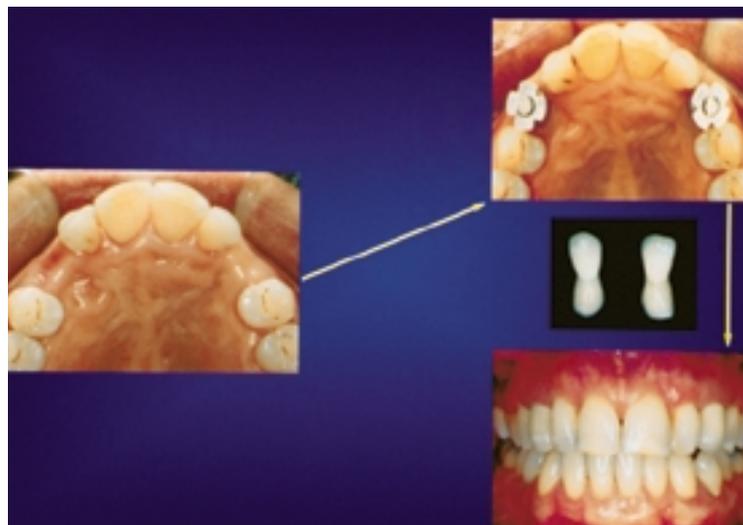
- How much training has the dentist had in this procedure?
- How many implant patients has he or she treated successfully?
- How long has the dentist been working with implants?

- If more than one dentist is involved, do they have a sound plan for coordinating your treatment?

WHAT ELSE SHOULD I KNOW?

Talk to your dentist about whether you are a candidate for dental implants, and learn more about the details of the procedure specific to your case.

After fully discussing the benefits and risks, you may want to contact your dental benefit provider to determine whether implant placement and restoration is covered by your dental insurance plan. If so, ask how much of the estimated cost will be covered.



Dental bridges and dentures have been used in restoring smiles for decades, but dental implants—such as those shown here—are another option that might work for you.

You also might want to talk to your dentist about the length of time the procedure may require. In many instances, implant placement involves more than one surgery, and the healing period for each surgery may be several weeks (your dentist usually can provide you with a denture or temporary bridge during this period). In some complicated cases, the whole process can take more than a year, so you would need to be patient and dedicated to good oral health.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

There is a wealth of information on dental care at your fingertips. Just go to the American Dental Association's Web site (www.ada.org) and click on the Public content area for more discussion about dental hygiene, oral health or the ADA Seal of Acceptance. You also can ask your dentist for a copy of the ADA brochure called "Dental Implants," which uses a question-and-answer format to describe types of implants and their benefits, candidates for the procedure, the materials used and the steps involved in the procedure. ■

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