

Dental Implants: Smile with Confidence

The effects of missing teeth can be detrimental to your oral health and may have an impact on your overall health and well-being. While replacing missing teeth can dramatically improve your smile, it can also improve both your dental health and self-esteem. Having gaps due to missing teeth affects the way the jaw closes. Over time, remaining teeth begin to tilt and drift into the gaps. Food can become trapped in these spaces, increasing the risk of decay and gum disease. Tilting and drifting can also cause problems for opposing teeth, causing the opposing jaw-line to have bite relationship problems.

As soon as a tooth is lost, either from gum disease or an extraction, the supporting bone in the jaw begins to break down. This process is called resorption. The longer a tooth is missing, the greater the bone loss, and prolonged absence of a tooth will significantly increase the complexity of any restoration.

As teeth are lost, it becomes more difficult to eat and chew food. Studies have shown that 29 percent of denture wearers eat only soft or mashed foods and 50 percent avoid many foods altogether.

There are options for replacing missing teeth, but if you're looking to replicate the natural function and appearance of your lost teeth there is now another choice. Historically, dentures or bridge restorations would be used as replacements; while these continue to be good options, each has their drawbacks. However, dental implants are natural-looking replacement teeth that provide the same function as your natural tooth root.

A single tooth or a full arch of teeth which has been lost due to injury or disease can be replaced with dental implants. A dental implant is a small, sturdy post, made of materials such as titanium, that acts like a root for a natural tooth, and is placed into your upper or lower jaw bone (often called endosteal, which means in the bone or subperiosteal, on the bone). After the bone has grown around the implant, implants can hold a crown, bridge or over-denture just like roots hold natural teeth in place. Implants are very durable and can last a lifetime. They require the same maintenance as natural teeth; this includes brushing, flossing and regular dental checkups.



Dental Implants

A tooth should be replaced as soon as it is lost in order to sustain a healthy oral environment, prevent additional bone loss and eliminate the movement of surrounding teeth.

Dental implants offer the look and feel of natural teeth. Implants offer stability because they fuse to your bone. Integration of the implants into your jaw bone also helps the replacement teeth feel more natural. Many people find this secure fit very comfortable.

Dental implants are an ideal option for people in good general oral health who have lost one or more teeth due to periodontal disease or an injury. Candidates for dental implants need to have healthy gums and adequate bone to support the implant. A thorough evaluation by your dentist will help determine whether dental implants are right for you.

A good dental implant candidate should have the following:

- ▶ Overall good health
- ▶ Healthy gums
- ▶ Enough bone to anchor the implants in the jaw — a dentist can evaluate the bone structure and recommend treatment options
- ▶ Be committed to taking very good care of the implanted teeth and surrounding gums — daily brushing and flossing are essential
- ▶ Regular dental checkups

Most adults can be candidates for dental implants. However, smokers, those with gum disease (which, when it strikes implants, is called peri-implantitis), and those with uncontrolled chronic diseases or systemic problems may not be good candidates for this procedure. Smoking impedes healing in the mouth and can reduce the likelihood that implants will be successful. People with poorly controlled diabetes may not be good candidates for implants as well, due to healing problems of the gum tissue that can arise.

Summary

Implants are the latest dental technology for replacing the roots of lost teeth. Crowns, bridges and dentures can use dental implants for support. Implants offer stability, comfort and a sense of freedom for those who have missing teeth and want to regain their smile.

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