

Implants

If you are self-conscious because you have missing teeth, wear dentures that are uncomfortable or don't want to have good tooth structure removed to make a bridge, talk to your dentist to see if dental implants are an option for you.

Dental implants are a popular and effective way to replace missing teeth and are designed to blend in with your other teeth. They are an excellent long-term option for restoring your smile. In fact, the development and use of implants is one of the biggest advances in dentistry in the past 40 years. Dental implants are made up of titanium and other materials that are compatible with the human body. They are posts that are surgically placed in the upper or lower jaw where they function as a sturdy anchor for replacement teeth.

Most patients find that a dental implant is secure, stable and a good replacement for their own tooth. There generally three phases to getting an implant:

- First, the dentist surgically places the implant into the jawbone. Your dentist may recommend a diet of soft foods, cold foods and warm soup during the healing process.
- Next, the bone around the implant heals in a process called osseointegration. What makes an implant so strong is that the bone actually grows around it and holds it in place. Osseointegration means “combines with the bone and takes time. Some patients might need to wait until the implant is completely integrated, up to several months before replacement teeth can be attached to the implant. Other patients can have the implants and replacement teeth placed all in one visit.
- Finally, it's time for the placement of the artificial tooth/teeth. For a single tooth implant, your dentist will customize a new tooth for you, called a dental crown. The crown will be based on size, shape, color and fit, and will be designed to blend in with your other teeth. If you are replacing more than a single tooth, custom-made bridge dentures will be made to fit your mouth and your implants. (Note: The replacement teeth usually take some time to make. In the meantime, your dentist may give you a temporary crown, bridge or denture to help you eat and speak normally until the permanent replacement is ready.)

If you are interested in dental implants, it's a good idea to discuss it carefully with your dentist first. If you are in good general health this treatment may be an option for you. In fact, your health is more of a factor than your age. You may be medically evaluated by a physician before any implant surgery is scheduled.

Chronic illnesses, such as diabetes or leukemia, may interfere with healing after surgery. Patients with these issues may not be good candidates for implants. Using tobacco can also slow healing.