

General Questions

Last Updated Wednesday, 20 September 2006

1. What is a dental implant?

A dental implant is a metallic root of a tooth. It is placed in the bone of your jaw by a dentist and allowed to heal in the bone for a period of time until the bone-implant union is strong enough to support a prosthetic tooth. The implant is made out of titanium, a metal that is very well tolerated by the human body.

You can get a very good idea of how implants work at my Visual Introduction section and the Patient Treatment Menu. Also the FAQ answers many questions about implants and their use

2. How is it used to replace missing teeth?

When you are using a dental implant to replace missing teeth, your dentist will first determine if you have enough supporting bone to safely place a dental implant to support a prosthetic tooth. The implant is placed into the bone in a very specific surgical procedure to insure that the implant will not be rejected by your body. In order to place the implant in the bone, it is necessary to cut through the gum tissue. The gum tissue will usually be sewed up either over the implant or around the implant after it is placed into the bone. The implant will then be allowed to heal in the bone for several months until the union is strong enough to support the prosthetic tooth.

To see lots of examples of dental implant use in real life situations, go to the Patient Treatment Menu.

3. What kind of dentist do I need to see?

Any dentist can place or restore a dental implant. Dental implants are usually placed by Oral Surgeons, Periodontists, Prosthodontists or General Practitioners. Prosthodontists and General Practitioners will usually be the one's who restore the "teeth". You should start by consulting with your general practitioner or a prosthodontist and determine how much experience and training they have in the general field of dental Implantology. If you elect to go with one of these practitioners, you can follow their recommendation as to who will actually place your dental implant. We will talk more about training and experience in the other sections of this module.

You may find more information at the "Finding a Dentist" section of the web site.

4. How much do implants cost?

The important thing here is get the information on ALL of the costs associated with dental implants. I have a section on FEES posted on this site, but fees vary tremendously and you have to know what you are paying for and what kind of warranties are available to you for the work that will be performed.

Make sure that your dentist sits down with you and discusses all of the fees you will incur. If you have two dentists who will be working with you (one placing your implants and one restoring them) make sure you know what both of their fees will be and make sure that you know who is responsible for what....

5. Are dental implants a permanent solution to tooth loss?

Yes dental implants are considered to be a permanent solution. There are, however, some caveats... Sometimes the dental implant does not integrate and it will be lost. In those cases, another implant might be placed that would stay there and become permanent. Sometimes, the restoration will have to be repaired or serviced... As a matter of fact, most restorations will require some degree of maintenance and sometimes replacement over a period of time. You should be prepared for future expenses in this regard.

6. Are there people who cannot have dental implants?

Most everyone can have dental implants placed, but there are some exceptions and some cautions... Patients who are uncontrolled diabetics or have severe psychological problems are not good candidates for dental implants. Patients with severe medical compromises are not good candidates for anything involving surgery although the dental implant procedures can normally be carried out under local anesthesia and are therefore less risky than surgical procedures requiring general anesthesia.

Patients missing a large amount of bone are not good candidates, but bone grafts can be used to replace the missing bone and allow the patient to have dental implants. You should speak very carefully to your dentist and find out just how good a candidate you are for dental implants. If there are things that will make you a better candidate, you should understand them and help to make the decision as to whether they will be implemented.

Those people who require significant bone grafting for implant placement should engage the services of a qualified oral surgeon. Many minor bone grafts can be accomplished by any competent dentist placing dental implants.

7. Is there a specialty of Implantology?

No... there is no specialty of Implantology and anyone who tells you they are a specialist in this field should be avoided. Right now, we have specialists in Oral Surgery, Periodontics and Prosthodontics who place dental implants. We also have many capable general dentists who place dental implants and we have Prosthodontists and general dentists who restore dental implants.

You should look for someone who is very experienced with dental implants and who has undergone a great deal of training throughout the years. It is also a good idea to utilize someone who works with dental implants quite a bit on a day to day basis.

8. How are dentists trained to do dental implants?

Most dentists are trained in these techniques through continuing education. However, more and more dentists are either trained in specialty programs or in university based dental implant programs. There are several University based programs throughout the country, the most comprehensive being the three year implant program at Loma Linda University in California.

9. How do I find a dentist to give me implants?

The best place to start is with your own general practitioner. He or she is familiar with your dental condition and they can advise as to who in the area is competent in these techniques. You can also ask friends or relatives who have had dental implants placed and dental implant restorations constructed. You will be amazed when you start asking around how many people have already benefited from dental implants. Of course, if you're already here, then you know about resources on the Internet. Search for information on dental implants and you will find everything you need, including a great dentist in your area.

Finding a dentist...

10. Where can I get more information about dental implants?

American College of Prosthodontists

Academy of Osseointegration

American Academy of Periodontology

American Dental Association

American Association of Oral & Maxillofacial Surgeons