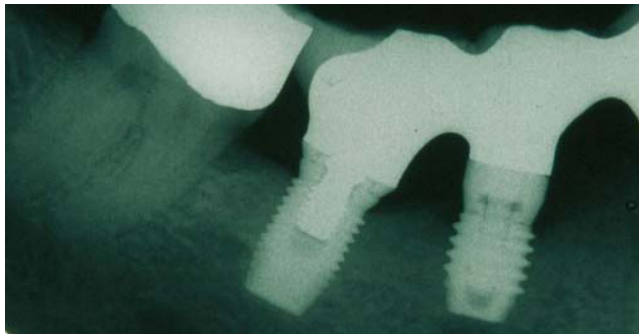


Dental implants



What are they?

Implants are one way of replacing missing teeth. Unlike other forms of replacement teeth, dental implants are small metal (mostly titanium) devices not unlike a screw fitting which are inserted into the jaw during surgery. Teeth, in the form of a crown or bridge are then attached to the implant, or the implant can be used to support dentures.

What are the benefits?

Some people have real difficulties with removable dentures. Implants can overcome these difficulties, in particular eating and speaking properly and they may improve appearance. If a denture is necessary, implants can greatly improve stability. People will not be able to see that your teeth are supported by implants. Implants can be used in place of bridges, for example when adjacent teeth are intact or may not be strong enough to support a bridge.

Are implants for me?

Your dentist should discuss with you whether implants would be right for you, and explain any associated risks.

Patients need to have healthy gums, and enough jawbone to take the implant that supports the replacement teeth although techniques are available to add (graft) additional bone if needed. Patients must also be prepared to maintain very good oral hygiene and visit the dentist regularly. Implants, like teeth, may be lost if mouth hygiene is poor.

Implant patients need to be in good general health. Some chronic diseases, such as diabetes, osteoporosis or chronic sinus problems, could interfere with healing and make implants more likely to fail. Make sure that you tell your dentist about any medicines that you take

regularly, and about your smoking habits. Smoking may well shorten the life of your implant.

Implants involve treatment over a period of several months and you may be referred to another dentist who can do this. Since they are a complicated form of treatment, implants can be expensive.

What will my dentist do?

Your dentist should tell you about the stages of treatment, who would be carrying out each stage and the timetable for completing treatment. You might be referred to a specialist.

This is what will happen:

- Bone is exposed in the jaw where the tooth is missing. Then a hole is drilled and the implant is inserted into the bone. This is usually done under a local anaesthetic, but sometimes sedation or a general anaesthetic is necessary. The gum is then stitched over the implant and it's left to heal for several weeks. This allows bone to grow around the implant and to make it secure.
- A second procedure is then planned, in which replacement teeth are mounted onto the implant. This requires a small cut in the gum above the implant. Once the soft tissues have healed, the replacement teeth may be fixed permanently or attached in a way that lets you remove them for cleaning. The replacement teeth might be single or in a group, and possibly as a 'bridge', attached to neighbouring natural teeth.
- There may be circumstances in which an implant can be placed during the same visit when the tooth is removed.
- More and more implants are being 'loaded' after placement rather than covered by the gum to heal. Please discuss this with your dentist.
- Maintaining good oral hygiene is important to prevent dental decay and gum disease, which may affect crowned teeth.