



Cornerstone Dental Group

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Frequently Asked Questions about Dental Implant Therapy

What are dental implants?

They are replacements for tooth roots made from a biocompatible (no known allergies) material called *titanium*. They serve as an anchor for replacement teeth and preserve jawbone volume, preventing changes to facial appearance that occur after tooth extraction.

They are considered the **standard of care** in tooth replacement. They are one the most predictable dental procedures that exist today. With **proper oral care**, they can last a lifetime. They are backed by over 40 years of scientific documentation.

Dental implants are the best tooth replacement alternative to natural teeth that exist today. They look and function like natural teeth and have the added benefit of not being susceptible to decay.

Why have dental implants become so popular?

The tremendous popularity of implants has largely resulted from people living longer and wanting to eat, chew, and experience food as they did with all their natural teeth and maintain their facial appearance. Implants give us the ability to restore something fundamental to our own body. Almost everyone wants to smile more frequently and feel more secure when they talk and laugh. Dental implants allow you to do everything you want with total self-assurance.

What are the benefits of dental implants?

Patients with implants have stated that they eat better, are more comfortable eating, and don't have to use denture adhesive to retain their dentures. They also say that they can talk and laugh without feeling self-conscious and without fear of their dentures slipping out.

All these improvements make people with dentures feel better about themselves, increasing their self-confidence while improving their social and business lives.

Why should I even consider getting dental implants?

Apart from being able to smile, eat, and speak better, dental implants prevent the onset of poor facial profile due to loss of bone mass in your jawbone. Implants prevent bone loss by transmitting load forces down into the jawbone during the chewing process. The jawbone reacts to this loading by increasing bone density. Implants are well known for stopping bone loss and restoring facial skeletal structure while significantly improving nutrition.

Will my dental implant replacement teeth look natural?

Your new replacement teeth will look, feel and function close to your natural teeth. And since implant treatment is the only solution that prevents bone resorption, which can cause your smile to look unnatural, long-term esthetics will be superior to any other treatment option.

What types of restorations can be placed on implants?

Implants can be used in various circumstances ranging from a removable denture to fixed crowns and bridges.

Why are dental implants better than alternative tooth replacement options such as bridges, partials and dentures?

Dental implants can last a lifetime, unlike bridges, partials and dentures, which may need to be replaced several times. Since dental implants prevent the bone resorption that occurs when teeth are missing, the smile's natural appearance is preserved. With implant treatment, there is no compromise to adjacent teeth; they are not cut down to place a bridge or loosened by the hooks on removable partials. Dentures and partials have the added disadvantage of accelerating the bone resorption process, which causes the appearance of premature aging.

What kind of foods can I eat with implants?

Implants will allow you to enjoy foods like raw vegetables, fruits, and meats. Implant-supported dentures can triple your biting force, allowing you to eat any hard food that your original teeth once could.

Who is a candidate for dental implant treatment?

Nearly anyone missing one or more teeth and in good general health is a candidate for dental implant treatment. Also, those dissatisfied with their present denture, partial denture, or bridge who would like to eat better with more comfort and feel more secure when they talk and laugh. A few medical conditions can undermine implant treatment's success, such as uncontrolled diabetes. However, very few conditions would keep someone from having implant treatment altogether.

Quality and quantity of available bone for implant placement are more often factors in qualifying for dental implants than medical conditions. However, even people who have lost a significant amount of bone can be eligible for dental implant treatment with additional procedures to add or create new bone. Advances in this treatment have made it possible for most people who would not previously have been considered candidates to have successful implant treatment.

What type of discomfort can be expected during the procedure?

Placing the root portion of the dental implant takes less than an hour. Most patients can return to work and function normally in their home lives. The discomfort level experienced during the implant procedure is similar to that of a simple root canal or tooth extraction. Local anesthesia (*freezing*) is provided during the procedure. In most cases, all that is required to control post-procedure discomfort is ibuprofen (Advil®).

How long will the entire process take?

The entire process typically involves 2-3 trips to the dentist over 4- to 5 months from when the implant is placed. Sometimes, the crown portion of the dental implant in the form of a "temporary" can be placed on the same day. After 4 to 5 months of healing, the temporary crown portion of the dental implant will be replaced with a final crown.

How long will they last?

Documented clinical research demonstrates that implant-supported replacement teeth have been successful for over 50 years. These were some of the first root-form implant cases ever completed and have been closely monitored. It is highly likely that these cases will be successful throughout the lifetime of those patients, with proper care.

Dental implants are designed to be permanent; however, many factors contribute to the long-term success of implant treatment, such as home care and regular maintenance visits to the dentist or dental specialist.

By comparison, research demonstrates that the typical tooth-supported bridge lasts from 7-10 years and that partials and dentures are functional for approximately 5 years. Insurance statistics indicate that bridges, partials and dentures last 5 years, and consequently, they generally pay for replacements every 5 years.

Do dental implants ever fail?

Dental implant treatment is one of the most successful procedures in the medical-dental field, with documented success rates of over 95%. Although successful treatment is very predictable, there are rare occasions where the bone does not completely bond to the implants. When this occurs, new implants are placed, and success rates for the replacement implants are even higher.

Smoking or putting too much pressure on newly placed implants, as with excessive teeth grinding, can cause problems with the bone bonding to the implants and should be avoided.

Does the body ever reject dental implants?

As indicated above, the success rates for dental implants are incredibly high. This is due in part to the fact that root-form implants are made of biocompatible material, titanium. Because titanium is accepted so well by the human body, it is also used for orthopedic implants, such as hip and knee replacements.

How do implants on dentures compare to ordinary dentures?

Dentures fixed to dental implants will give you an enhanced improvement in your quality of life that standard dentures cannot provide.

McGill University in Toronto conducted a study to determine if people, especially older adults, can improve their chewing ability and nutrition if they wear dentures anchored by implants. After 6 months, the group with dental implants did not only increase their body fat, but blood tests recorded significantly higher levels of albumin, hemoglobin (Iron) and vitamin B12- all indicators of nutrition. The study group also reported significant improvements in their ability to chew meat and hard vegetables and did not avoid foods they did in the past.

Is it possible to use an existing denture with dental implants?

Sometimes, it is possible to use a patient's existing denture instead of fabricating a new denture to snap onto dental implants by altering it to accommodate the necessary attachments. However, there are several factors that must be considered. Since each patient's situation is unique, the possibility of using an existing denture can only be determined in consultation with a dentist or dental specialist.

If dental implants preserve bone, why would a dentist recommend a tooth-supported bridge?

Since dental implants preserve bone, implant treatment is usually considered the treatment of choice if a patient qualifies as a candidate. Now that implants are considered standard of care, it is much less common for dentists to recommend fixed bridges instead of implants. Some dentists recommend bridges for patients who are not candidates for implants or when patients insist on having the lowest possible fee for tooth replacement.

However, even in cases where the teeth adjacent to the missing tooth/teeth have restorations, many dentists do not want to grind these teeth down to fit a bridge, as this compromises the long-term health of those teeth. And most dentists do not like grinding perfect teeth without restorations to place a traditional bridge. Therefore, will almost always recommend dental implant treatment in these cases.

Are there situations where a dental specialist would recommend extracting a tooth and replacing it with an implant-supported crown?

There are many situations where natural teeth are either failing or are about to fail. This includes severe periodontal disease (gum disease) that has eroded the bone that supports teeth. Sometimes, in these cases, it is preferable to extract the teeth, eliminate the disease and infection and replace them with implant-supported crowns/bridges.

There are also situations where a tooth has had a root canal (nerves have been removed from the tooth), leaving the tooth brittle and susceptible to fracture. In cases where the tooth needs to be retreated and the prognosis is not favourable, it is preferable to extract the tooth and replace it with an implant-supported crown.

Teeth with severe fractures or cracks are usually extracted and are ideal candidates for replacement with dental implant treatment.

What happens if I wait?

Tooth Loss = Bone Loss. When the root of a tooth is extracted, the clock starts ticking, and the jawbone begins to dissolve. During the first year after tooth extraction, the average individual can expect to lose between 4-5 mm of bone (25%). By year three of tooth extraction, the jawbone can dissolve as much as 60% of its former size.

Dental implants are the only tooth replacement option that prevents bone loss after tooth extraction.

Facial changes due to jaw bone shrinkage.

The greater the number of missing tooth roots, the more significant the negative change in facial appearance will be. As the jawbone dissolves away, the lack of bone support for the face creates the appearance of premature aging and wrinkles.

Dental implants, like tooth roots, need three dimensions of bone volume to be stabilized (anchored). Dental implants can only be so small in diameter and length. If too much time has elapsed after tooth root extraction, there might not be enough jawbone to stabilize the implant. The best time to choose dental implant therapy is immediately or shortly after the tooth extraction when the most amount of jawbone is present.

Partial denture and full denture wearers must endure constant denture relines due to the changes in their jaw dimensions due to the jawbone dissolving. As the jawbone dissolves, the partial or full denture must become thicker and thicker to compensate for the missing jawbone. This is necessary to support a normal facial structure appearance. As a denture becomes larger and larger over time, it negatively affects the denture wearer's ability to chew, speak and taste. The denture wearer will also experience increased gum soreness and jaw pain as the bone dissolves closer and closer to the nerve canal within the lower jaw.

I've lived with my denture or partial for years; can't I get by?

It is important to note that the denture replaces the crown portion of a tooth only; it does not replace the root portion of a tooth. As a result, the jawbone is not stimulated and starts to dissolve. As the jawbone dissolves over time, the denture wearer will experience an escalating deterioration of their quality of life. The denture wearer will experience **increased difficulties** with the following:

Denture Stabilization
Eating
Tasting
Speaking

Jaw Pain
Nutrition Health
Facial Appearance
Self Confidence

Am I too old for dental implants?

There is no upper age limitation to have an implant. If you are "healthy" enough for the procedure and you have the desire, then you are a candidate for the procedure. Patients over 90 years of age have replaced loose partials and complete dentures with implant-supported restorations, and their main comment is: *I wish I had done this sooner. I can now eat the food I **want** to eat, not what I **can** eat.* They are experiencing a better overall quality of life. They enjoy the benefits of easier chewing, digestion, speaking, better nutrition and an increased ability to taste.

What is involved with taking care of dental implants?

The home care recommended varies depending upon the type of implant-supported replacement teeth. For example, a single implant-supported crown is cleaned like a natural tooth with regular brushing and interproximal cleaning with a Proxi-Brush. Implant-supported bridges that replace a few teeth are cleaned like tooth-supported bridges, brushing and interproximal cleaning.

Home care is a little more complicated for people who are missing all of their teeth, and special brushes are often recommended. With overdentures, it is necessary to clean the implant

attachments, as well as the overdenture itself. Permanently fixed implant-supported replacement teeth are cleaned like all other bridges.

Although dental implants are not susceptible to decay, in all cases, it is recommended that patients see their regular dentist and hygienist at least twice each year unless they routinely see the periodontist; in this case, they would continue to alternate visits. It is usually recommended that the patient see the surgical specialist who places the implant(s) at least once yearly. These visits, combined with proper home care, are essential to the long-term success of implant treatment.

Do dental insurance plans cover dental implant treatment?

It's important to note that insurance companies are publicly traded entities. Their primary interest is creating profits for their various shareholders, not paying out benefits to their policyholders: the two are in direct conflict with one another. Insurance companies make profits by not paying out benefits to policyholders.

Insurance coverage of implant treatment depends on the individual policy. However, it is rare to receive any substantial coverage. Since the benefit coverage is determined strictly by the amount the employer wants to spend on the policy and the insurance companies want to build profit margins, there are significant limitations on most dental insurance plans. In reality, the plans are only designed to cover routine maintenance, emergencies and basic care.

The insurance companies use statistical data to determine the most common procedures submitted on claims, and then they set their own *usual and customary fee* schedule for these procedures. They also choose the specific restrictions and limitations for each plan. Because the plans only cover the basics, most plans have an annual maximum allowable benefit of \$1,000-\$1,500.

Although most companies exclude implants as a covered benefit, many will pay the same benefit they would cover for the lowest cost alternative treatment option (partials and dentures) and some of the diagnostic records if a specific request is made for *alternative benefits*. Even if an individual policy includes implants as a covered benefit, the amount of coverage is still limited to the annual maximum allowable.

Your local dental provider will gladly look into your dental plan to see if you qualify for dental implant coverage. They will look to see if your plan contains an *Alternate Benefit Clause* or a *Health Spending Account*.

What is the cost of implant treatment?

An investment in dental implant treatment is an investment in overall health, appearance and well-being, as it involves preserving the integrity of facial structures, as well as replacing missing teeth.

The actual cost of implant treatment is based on several factors, such as the number of missing teeth being replaced, the type of implant-supported teeth (treatment option) recommended and whether additional procedures are necessary to achieve the proper esthetic and functional result.

There is often a misconception that each implant has a set cost. The fees are calculated based on the amount of time the dental specialist anticipates spending to complete treatment (implant placement,

other surgical procedures, fabrication of replacement teeth) as well as the estimated cost of implants, other components and materials necessary to complete treatment – and dental laboratory fees.

The fee is usually comparable to other methods of tooth replacement; however, long-term implant treatment is generally more cost-effective than other options, such as bridges, partials and dentures that need to be replaced every 5-10 years.

Thank you, and if there are any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact the office.