

Dental implants

A large number of people lack one or more teeth. The traditional methods of replacing missing teeth have been limited to a fixed bridge, or a removable denture. Over the last few years, dental implants have rapidly become the preferred treatment for anyone seeking the optimal method of replacing missing teeth. Dental implants offer a large number of advantages over conventional solutions for replacing natural teeth.

If the answer to any of the questions below is yes, then dental implants are for you.

Do you:

- Hide your smile because of spaces from missing teeth?
- Feel your dentures are not secure?
- Are unable to eat hard foods with your bridge?
- Have difficulty chewing?
- Wish you could smile, speak and eat in complete comfort and want to have the natural tooth advantages, but are missing one or more teeth?

Dental implants are also sometimes referred to as the 'third set' of teeth (after baby teeth and adult teeth). Dental implants can replace any number of teeth, from a single tooth to a complete set.

WHAT IS A DENTAL IMPLANT?

A dental implant is an artificial tooth root that is surgically inserted into your jaw bone to hold a replacement tooth or denture in place. Thus an implant is held in the jaw bone just like your natural teeth. In most cases this artificial root is a titanium screw that is placed surgically in the bone. The screw then fuses biologically with the living bone (a process



called osseointegration) to form a strong foundation upon which a crown or bridge can be placed.

WHO IS SUITABLE FOR A DENTAL IMPLANT?

If you have one or several missing teeth, you are a candidate to have one or more dental implants. You should always consult with your dentist, who will decide whether or not a dental implant is the appropriate treatment for you. With advances in technology, most people can benefit from the advantages of implants.

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OVER CONVENTIONAL REPLACEMENTS?

The conventional methods of replacing missing teeth are bridges or dentures.

Bridges involve placing the false teeth with support of adjacent teeth. This includes trimming adjacent healthy teeth on which the bridge is placed. Such trimming may compromise the health of these teeth in the long run. The bridge may also need replacement every 10 to 15 years. Besides the additional load of false teeth is distributed on the adjacent healthy teeth thereby compromising them in the long run.

Dentures are teeth attached to a plastic or metal plate. They are often cumbersome as they have to be removed every day.

Having dental implants fixed securely into your jawbone provides many advantages. These include:

- Implants provide better support and result in more comfortable and stable replacement teeth.
- Implants provide better chewing efficiency and allow the patient to have permanent fixed teeth without trimming own natural teeth for support, or having to remove the teeth every day.
- Implants also slow down the shrinkage of the jawbone which occurs as a result of tooth loss
- Implants can be placed in cases where it is not possible to put a bridge for reasons such as lack of healthy adjacent teeth since they are independently inserted into the jawbone.
- Implants eliminate the need for removable dentures.

They provide stability for dentures, in cases where the patient has lost most or all of their teeth, thereby promoting patient self-confidence. This improves speech, appearance and chewing function

Dental implants typically last much longer (upto 30 years) as compared to bridges and dentures.

What does dental implant treatment involve?

Dental implant treatment normally flows in the following steps:

- A thorough assessment with X-rays, is initially carried out and the treatment is carefully planned.
- The surgical part of the treatment is carried out using local anaesthesia. After



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administering anaesthesia, your dentist inserts the implant root into the jawbone.

- Post insertion, the gums are then closed with stitches. It takes between 8-12 weeks for the bone to heal completely.

- Post healing, the implant location is uncovered and an implant crown is attached.

- The actual implant procedure normally ranges between 30 minutes to 1 hour, depending on the complexity of the implant.

HOW IS THE RECOVERY?

In many cases, patients have reported that dental implants are less troublesome than

having teeth removed. With modern anaesthesia and close attention to post operative care, you can expect minimal discomfort. In the initial days, there will be some dull pain, which can be lessened by taking pain relief tablets over 2-5 days. After the first week, this discomfort will gradually subside. The total time taken to complete the treatment can range from 8 to 12 weeks.

— *Dr Richa Raj is a practising dental surgeon at Pearly White Dental Centre, Al Khuwair*