

Dental Implants – A Natural Looking, Permanent Alternative to Dentures!

A dental implant is an artificial tooth root that's placed into your jaw so that a replacement prosthetic tooth can be held in place. Implants look and feel like real teeth, they are permanent, and they don't slip or cause discomfort (unlike dentures). They have been around for more than 20 years and have an average success rate of 98 percent.

Any licensed dentist can perform an implant although some specialists are better than others. Read on to learn more about dental implant therapy, how it works, and what to expect afterwards.

The Surgical Phase

The first phase of implant therapy is the surgical phase, which generally requires local anesthesia and/or sedation. This is the same type of anesthesia used in other dental procedures like fillings or oral surgery, so it is very safe and effective.

The dentist will generally perform two surgeries:

- The **first surgery** prepares the jawbone for the implant. This may on rare occasions include a bone graft if the patient doesn't have enough bone to hold the implant.
- After the patient has healed, a **second surgery** is performed to place a metal post into the jaw. This post will eventually hold the prosthetic tooth permanently in place.

Most patients report very little discomfort from the procedures. In fact, many patients report that the surgeries involve less pain than a tooth extraction!

Healing Period

After the metal post is placed into the jaw, there is a significant healing period before the restorative phase can begin. This period can last anywhere from six to 12 weeks depending on how quickly the patient's bone grows and fuses with the metal structure.

Many patients are concerned about how their smile will look during this time, especially if the implant is in the front of the mouth. But the dentist can actually provide a partial, temporary denture to cover the gap during the healing process. It is a simple appliance that can be removed for cleaning and also while you sleep.

The Restorative Phase

Once the jaw has fully healed, patients begin the restorative phase of therapy. During this time the dentist will:

- Create a prosthetic tooth for the patient that matches his or her other teeth
- Attach the prosthetic tooth to the implant using a small connector post called an abutment

Patients can opt for a removable implant prosthesis or a fixed one. **Removable implants** are similar to traditional dentures in that they can be removed for cleaning and repair. **Fixed implants** are permanently screwed or cemented into the mouth, and can't be taken out by the patient.

Care for Dental Implants

All implants are made of titanium metal and are meant to last a lifetime. They require nothing more than normal brushing, flossing, and any other oral care routine your dentist has recommended.

Just be sure to have your implant checked regularly by your dentist and avoid engaging in habits that may damage it (like chewing hard items or grinding your teeth). Anything that might damage or break your natural teeth could also damage your implant.