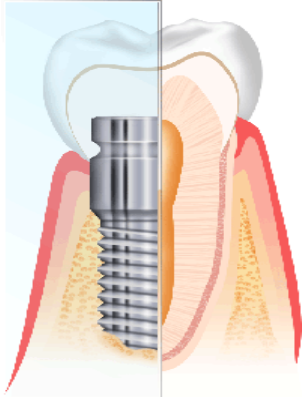


What is a Dental Implant?



A dental implant is normally a titanium screw that is implanted into the jaw bone to replace the old root. A natural looking crown is then attached to perfectly replicate the missing tooth. Unlike bridgework, implants do not affect the surrounding teeth. Integrated into the jaw, they avoid gum problems and bone loss that can accompany a bridge or dentures.

You might need dental implants if you are missing one or several teeth. Things to watch out for are:

- Your jaw may not be suited to implants and a bone graft may be required
- The implantation procedure requires unique skills and there are dramatically different levels of training, everything from a weekend to 3 years. Check to see that your dentist has the necessary qualifications
- Implants should not be used if your bone growth is not complete
- If you are smoker or are taking immune-suppressants the success rate for implants decreases

Ask your dentist what their 5 year success rate is – it should be about 95% for the lower jaw and 90% for the upper jaw.

What is the procedure like?

Implants can be placed either at the time of removal of the old tooth or at any time afterwards: the process is quicker if they are placed immediately after removal. Typically this is performed under a local anaesthetic.

The gum and jaw are prepared, creating an opening for the titanium screw. The screw is secured in place and then the gum is stitched over allowing the area to heal. Titanium has unique properties that allow it to integrate naturally with bone.

Over a period of three to six months the titanium and bone merge to form a very strong bed on which a crown or cap can be placed. This period before a final crown is placed can be shortened dramatically if the implant is placed at the time of extraction, to the extent that sometimes a crown can be fitted at the same time as the titanium screw is attached.

What different types exist?



There are about 50 different types of implants and the particular type or brand chosen by your dentist will depend on a variety of factors, including their training, their equipment, their stock, your bone density and the width of your jaw.

There is one other major category of implant, called blade or narrow. These are typically used when the patient's jaw will not support normal screw-type implants.

There is also an alternative use of the implanted screws that allows dentures to be secured permanently to the jaw, thus preventing any accidental movement and improving their overall function.

The newest technologies also allow for what are called implants in a day or immediate load implants. This technique is very new though, and not very widespread. It is normally recommended to leave between 3 and 6 months between having an implant fitted and placing a crown on it.