

### What are dental implants?

A dental implant is a titanium metal rod which is placed into the jawbone. It is used to support one or more false teeth. In practice, both the false teeth and their supporting rod are known as 'implants'.

### Are implants safe and how long will they last?

Implants are a well-established, tried and tested treatment. Over 95% of modern implants should last for many years given the right care.

### I have some of my own teeth. Could I still have implants?

Yes, You can have any number of teeth replaced with implants - from one single tooth to a complete set.

### Can implants always be used to replace missing teeth?

It depends on the condition of the bone in your jaw. Your dentist will arrange for a number of special tests to find out the amount of bone still there. If there is not enough, or if it is not healthy enough, it may not be possible to place implants without grafting bone into the area first.

### Do implants hurt?

Placing the implants means having a small operation. This can be done using a simple local anaesthetic, and sometimes with sedation if you are very nervous. Sometimes the dentist needs to use a general anaesthetic for complex cases. You will not feel any pain at the time, but you may feel some discomfort during the week after the surgery. This is usually due to having stitches, and the normal healing process taking place.

### How long does treatment take?

Your dentist will be able to give you a rough timetable before the treatment starts. Usually the permanent teeth are fitted 6 to 9 months after the implants are put in, but many implant systems now allow the time to be as short as 3 months. Some teeth can now even be fitted at the same time as the implants (known as immediate implants) but you should check with your dentist to see whether these are suitable for you.

### What about after care?

Your dentist may give you some pain relief after the surgery, or check whether you have them at home to take over the next few days if you need them. Your dentist may also prescribe antibiotics. Don't smoke, exercise or drive for the rest of the day. Don't rinse the area and only eat soft foods. Remember, it is important to keep your mouth clean by brushing, but do not poke the implant site. You can use a chlorhexidine mouthwash every day during the first week after surgery (you can get these from supermarkets and chemists).

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### What happens next?

The implants need to bond with the bone after they have been put in. This usually takes about 3 months in the lower jaw and 6 months in the upper jaw. Sometimes the implant may be stable enough when they are fitted for the artificial teeth to be attached much sooner than this.

If you are having one, two or three teeth replaced, you may have a temporary denture fitted in the meantime. If you have complete dentures, then you can keep wearing these throughout the healing period once they have been modified after the surgery. A healing cap will usually be placed onto the implant site to protect the area during healing.

### Are the teeth difficult to clean?

No. But after care is important if you are going to have a long-lasting, successful implant. Your dentist should give you detailed advice on how to look after your implants. Cleaning around the teeth attached to the implants is no more difficult than cleaning natural teeth. However, there may be areas that are difficult to reach and you'll be shown methods to help you. You may need to visit your hygienist more often but your dentist will be able to talk to you about this.

### If I had gum disease when I had my own teeth, will I get it with the teeth attached to the implants?

Yes, if you don't care for them well enough. If you keep them clean, and don't smoke, then you should not have any problems.

### Can I take the teeth out if they are fixed to implants?

Most artificial teeth attached to implants can only be placed and removed by the dentist. However, if you have complete dentures fixed to the implants by bars, then you'll be able to take them out for cleaning.

### Do the implants show?

Your dentist will make sure that the implants won't show during all normal movements of the mouth and lips. However you will need to be able to see them, so that you can clean them properly.

### Do I have an implant for each missing tooth?

No, unless you're only having a single missing tooth replaced. Normally, five or six implants are used to replace all the teeth in one jaw, as each implant can usually support two teeth. For a few missing teeth, two or three implants may be used.

### What if I have an accident?

Implants and the teeth they support can be damaged in an accident in the same way that natural teeth can. It is therefore important that you wear a professionally made mouthguard if you play sports that involve contact or moving objects. Should damage occur, the teeth can be dismantled from the implant and replaced. However, if the titanium rod is damaged beyond repair, this part may be safely left in the jaw if it is too difficult to remove. Another implant may be placed alongside it to replace the damaged implant.

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### **What happens if the implant does not bond with the bone?**

This happens very rarely. If the implant becomes loose during the healing period or just after, then it is easily removed and healing takes place in the normal way. Once the jaw has healed, another implant can be placed there. Or, the dentist can make a bridge, using the implanted false teeth that have 'taken'.

### **Is the treatment expensive?**

Unfortunately, yes. However, in many situations, the cost of the treatment is only a little more than the cost of more conventional treatment with crowns and bridges. Over the longer term, implants are usually a more cost-effective and satisfactory option.

There are advantages to this treatment too. An implant to replace a single tooth avoids the need to cut down the teeth either side for crowns to support a bridge. Normal dentures often mean you can't eat well or speak well due to the dentures moving about. Having teeth attached to implants, however, avoids this problem as they are anchored to the bone more firmly than natural teeth.

### **Where do I get this treatment?**

Talk to your dentist, so you can be referred to a specialist for assessment and treatment. Your dentist may already carry out some or all of this type of treatment and will give you the advice you need.

Remember to ask exactly what treatment is proposed, what experience the dentist has in this work, the total cost of the treatment and what the alternatives are. Make sure you get a treatment plan, along with an estimate and ask if a guarantee is included in your payment.

If you are unhappy with any of the answers you get then ask for a second opinion. You will be spending a lot of time, effort and money, so you must be sure that you know what you are getting at the end of treatment.