

Smiles Better

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So Spring is in the air, and the long evenings are here! I always notice that this time of year people have an extra spring in their step and are smiling a lot more, funny what a change of weather does to us!!

This month I want to tell you all about Dental Implants. I've had a few really interesting cases recently where patients have had partial dentures for years and they just decided to replace them with implants. The results really are amazing, and for the patient it really is a life changing event, they all say they wish they'd done it years ago!



What are dental implants?

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A dental implant is an artificial tooth made of titanium metal which is placed into the jaw bone. It is used to support one or more false teeth. Together the titanium metal insert and the false tooth are known as a dental implant.

Implants are well established and 90% of implants last for at least 15 years. One implant can replace 1 or 2 teeth or multiple implants can be used to replace multiple teeth.

The benefits of implant treatment over dentures and bridges include:

Reduced bone loss: when you lose teeth the bone surrounding them normally shrinks away, but if an implant is placed soon after a tooth has been extracted it preserves the bone. In some cases when teeth have been missing for some time a bone graft will be needed.

Improved function: once integrated into the bone, dental implants function

as well as your natural teeth

Improved dental hygiene: implants can be cleaned the same way as your natural teeth

Better aesthetics: if done correctly a dental implant should be indistinguishable from your surrounding natural teeth

No need to drill or remove any healthy tooth structure. For patients who are wearing full dentures implants are also an option, they can be used to hold your denture in place meaning no more fixative!

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Is there any pain or discomfort involved?

Most patients report that there is very little discomfort and that they were much more comfortable following the procedure than they anticipated. The implants are placed in a very gentle fashion under local anaesthetic and care is taken of

the various tissues involved. Sedation may be used to make the treatment as relaxing as possible. You may have a little post-op pain due to the stitches in place, but painkillers normally control this. Your dentist may recommend that you speak to another patient who has already had an implant placed to assess their personal experience.

How long does the process take?

This is different in each case depending on how many teeth need replaced, but generally once the implant (metal rod) is placed it takes 3-6 months for the bone to integrate with the implant before it can be restored with a permanent restoration, during this period you will have a temporary tooth in place before the permanent restoration can be attached to the implant.

It's really important to look after the implants once treatment is completed. You will be responsible for daily plaque

removal through brushing, flossing and interdental brushes. Implants like your natural teeth are susceptible to gum disease so it's really important that patients see the Hygienist every 3-6 months.

Are they suitable for everyone?

Dental implants are not suitable for everyone but they can be used on most patients. The success of a dental implant is largely dependent on bone density in the jaw, there needs to be enough bone and it must be dense enough to support an implant. Dentists can perform bone grafts on patients that don't have sufficient bone mass in their jaw.

Smoking is not a contraindication to having dental implants but patients need to be aware that healing may be slower and that it will lower the success rate of having an implant.