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The Replacements

When people lose or break their teeth, the teeth may be replaced with implants. What's involved, and what are the benefits? Read on to learn more.

What are implants?

Dental implants are artificial tooth roots that are surgically anchored to the jaw to hold a replacement tooth or bridge in place. One of the major benefits of implants is that they do not rely on neighboring teeth for support and they are permanent and stable. Implants are a good solution to tooth loss because they look and feel like natural teeth.

What are implants made of?

Implant material is made from different types of metallic and bone-like ceramic materials that are compatible with body tissues. Most implants are made of titanium, which bonds well with bone and is biocompatible, making it an ideal material for implants.

How are implants placed?

First, a general dentist, oral surgeon, or other specialist will perform surgery to place the implant's anchor in the jaw. The surgery can last several hours, and it may take as long as six months for the jaw bone to grow around the anchor to hold it firmly in place. Once the implant is stable and the gums have healed, the dentist or specialist makes the artificial teeth and fits them to the post portion of the anchor. Your dentist will work with you to create an implant that fits well and is comfortable and attractive.

Who places the implants?

Depending upon their training, general dentists, oral surgeons, or other specialists can place implants.



Who should get implants?

Implants are not an option for everyone. Because implants require surgery, patients must be in good health, have healthy gums, and have adequate bone structure to support the implants. While lack of adequate bone support is a limitation, additional procedures may be available to create a good implant site. People who are unable to wear dentures also may be good candidates. The success rate for implants decreases dramatically among those who suffer from chronic problems, such as clenching or bruxism, or systemic diseases, such as diabetes. Additionally, people who smoke or drink alcohol may not be good candidates. For more information, talk to your dentist.

What is the difference between implants and dentures?

While implants are permanently fixed in the mouth, dentures are removable. A conventional removable full denture depends upon support from the bone and soft tissues rather than being solidly fixed in place; as a result, dentures may not offer as much stability as implants.

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How do I care for implants?

Poor oral hygiene is a main reason why some implants fail. It is important to floss and brush around implants at least twice a day. Your dentist will give you specific instructions on how to care for your new implants. Additional dental cleanings (up to four times per year) may be necessary to ensure that you retain healthy gums.

How will I adjust to implants?

Most people adjust to implants immediately; however, some people feel slight discomfort and notice differences in chewing or speech for a short time. Patients will soon see a difference in their confidence level and enjoy their new smile.

Resources

www.agd.org

At the AGD's Web site, you can search more than 300 oral health topics, post a dental question, sign up for e-newsletters, find an AGD dentist, and more.

1.877.2X.A.YEAR

AGD's toll-free referral number. Call to locate an AGD member dentist in your area.