

COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What are they and how do they work?

Implants are much like artificial tooth roots, except they are made of a specific metal, titanium. When placed, bone and bone cells will grow right against the material and "fuse" with it. The body does not reject the material nor recognize it as "foreign." Titanium is also the only material that can support biting forces when placed in the mouth.

Our dentists use titanium alloy exclusively for all our implants. This material is superior to surgical stainless steel - which, although it has been used in medicine for years for pins and artificial joints, is only tolerated by the body. The body does not fuse with it, but instead creates a fibrous capsule around the steel.

Implants also prevent the gradual loss of bone material in the jaw that occurs over time with the use of dentures.

Are all implants successful?

The success rate of implants is very high, however there are several variables to consider before placing an implant. First the patient must be healthy and have adequate healing powers. Uncontrolled diabetics generally have poor healing, poor immune systems, are prone to infections and hence their illness may compromise the long-term future of the implant. Second, a proper diagnosis and treatment plan must be selected for the individual patient. Third, proper home care and regular maintenance is essential for long-term success. Heavy smoking or excessive alcohol consumption could impair the health of the gums and the implant.

Will implants last a lifetime?

There are some implants, which have been in the mouth for as long as thirty years. Our understanding of how placement, design, bone physiology and engineering of the prosthetics affects the long term prognosis, and the overall advancement in education of the many dentists placing implants, means we will probably see many more implants lasting an increasing longer period of time. However, thirty years is still not the average. In many cases our own teeth do not last thirty years. Our health and maintenance is extremely important in determining how long an implant will last. In the final analysis, whether they last a lifetime depends on how long you live and at what age you are when implant(s) are placed.

Is age a deterrent?

Anyone from 16 to over 80 years old can benefit from implants, as health is really the determining factor. In fact, many people 70 and 80 years of age are better candidates than someone years younger who has physical complications.

But no matter what your age, the bottom line is that eating comfortably is critical to enjoying life.

For older patients, dental implants allow them to do away with dentures, and chew food such as meat and raw vegetables again, helping them maintain their quality of life. As well, older individuals are more likely to need implants because they usually have lost more teeth and supporting ridges. Digestion and absorption of essential nutrients from food can then become impaired and the need to be able to eat all types of nutritious foods becomes even more important.

Number of implants

The number of implants required is directly dependent on:

1. the number of missing teeth the implants will support.
2. the type of teeth (molars versus incisors)
3. the quantity and quality of bone in the area.

Our natural teeth are also designed with the above concepts in mind. For example, our molar teeth typically have two or three roots and they are separated in the form of a "v" or tripod to create a very large surface area of support. This is essential as the bone in these areas is usually not very dense and yet this area receives a lot of forces from chewing. Our front teeth typically have single roots, yet are able to support chewing since the forces are less and the bone is much more dense.

For us to determine how many implants you will need, we have to consider all of the above factors. The final prosthetics will be designed or envisioned beforehand and then we will work backwards. Single teeth are generally supported by one implant. Up to three, and possibly four teeth could be supported by two implants if the other factors are positive. Full upper arches generally require six to ten implants and full lower arches four to eight implants.

Permanent, non-removable crowns or bridges generally require the greatest support, as the implants will support the entire chewing force. In some cases, implants are used to retain and support removable teeth (overdentures). With overdentures, some of the forces can be distributed to the tissue surfaces, and some freedom of movement can be designed into the prosthetics. This will lessen the load or forces on each implant and by so doing it may be possible to place fewer implants.

IMPORTANT! Regardless of whom you may seek for your dental implants, it is extremely important that the dentist(s) determine the type of teeth, your occlusion (bite), and the bone support available, prior to determining the type, number and placement (location) of implants. If this is not done, the implants may be initially successful, integrate (become rigid) and support the teeth for the first months or years, but later you may be at risk of losing bone, implants and/or the entire prosthetics. And all too often, trying to fix the problems years later turns out to be more extensive and expensive than if it had been done correctly in the first place.

Types of teeth

Implants can be used to replace one to several teeth. When replacing single teeth, they can be made to resemble a real tooth. Implants can be used for full arches, to fabricate permanent non-removable teeth, or they can be made to hold and secure removable teeth. The number of implants required depends on the number of teeth (or tooth roots) they are replacing, and the type of teeth that are being placed on top of the implants. See the section on [implant treatment options](#) for the different ways implants are being used to replace teeth.

Is there a guarantee?

If an implant is placed and fails to integrate, we will replace it at no cost to you. This is an extremely rare occurrence in our office; however, should it happen, we will determine and correct the problem and replace the implant.

Once integrated, the success depends partly on the design of the prosthetics and loading, and we will treatment plan accordingly. Success also depends on your long-term care and maintenance of your teeth.

Will there be discomfort?

Just as with any surgery there will be some discomfort the first few days following surgery. This is usually minimal to moderate, similar to having a tooth removed, and for the majority of our patients it is easily controlled with non-narcotic medications such as ibuprofen or Tylenol. However, we are not all alike and you will be provided with alternative medications should it be necessary. During the procedure there will not be any discomfort as the combination of local anaesthetics and sedation will keep you comfortable.

How much time does it take?

This also depends on the complexity of the treatment. Individual procedures are completed from thirty minutes to several hours. The total treatment time can vary from four months to two years.

Will I be without teeth?

If you need a longer healing process until your final implants are completed, you may be without teeth for a few weeks or months. If this is the case, we can often make you a temporary implant that can support fixed or non-moveable teeth.

Also, in some cases where patients have dentures, we ask them to wear them as minimally as possible for the first few days to one week following surgery.

How long will I be off work?

Generally we recommend the day of surgery plus one to three days for recovery. For simple procedures you may be able to return to work the next day, and more complex procedures may require a longer recovery time. In all cases, we do not recommend any exercise or strenuous physical activity for at least three to seven days following surgery.