



Frequently Asked Questions About Dental Implants

**MetLife**[®]

What are dental implants?

A dental implant is an artificial tooth root placed in your jaw to hold a replacement tooth. In general, there are three parts to a dental implant:

1. Implant—A small screw-like metal post implanted into the jaw
2. Abutment—A small metal extension, which is placed on top of the implant
3. Crown—The replacement tooth that sits on top of the abutment.¹

Dental implants can be used as the support for a dental crown (replacement tooth), as anchors for fixed bridges, or as support for removable partial or complete dentures. In some patients one or more implants might be used depending on whether a single tooth is being replaced, multiple teeth are being replaced, or full denture support is needed.¹

While the cost is generally higher than other options for replacing teeth, there are a number of advantages to dental implants. When compared to bridges or dentures, implants are generally more comfortable, since they look and feel like natural teeth. In addition, the lifespan of a dental implant is typically much longer than that of a bridge or denture. In some cases, dental implants may be the only treatment available for restoring missing teeth, based upon the complexity of the clinical situation.²

Are dental implants right for me?

In general, implants may be considered if you are in good overall health as well as in good oral health, and practice good oral hygiene.² Dental implants are not recommended for people who smoke. Smoking negatively affects blood flow to the bone and tissues surrounding the gums and teeth, which impairs bone healing. If the bone around the implant cannot heal effectively, the implant will fail.³ If you're a smoker, ask your dentist what steps you can take to help increase your chances of becoming a candidate for dental implants.

Some medications, such as bisphosphonates taken for osteoporosis, may cause problems with the success of a dental implant.⁴ Be sure to discuss your medications (prescription, over-the-counter, and herbal remedies) with your dentist. Based on your health history, your dentist can help determine if dental implants are a potential treatment option for you.

What are the steps involved in getting a dental implant?

Once you and your dentist have decided on a dental implant, placing the implant typically takes more than one office visit. In addition, you may be treated by a number of dental professionals who all help in the placement of your implant.

In general, there are three steps in placing a dental implant:

1. Integration—In this step, a dental surgeon (a periodontist, oral surgeon, or your general dentist) places the implant into your jaw. Over the next few months, the bone in your jaw grows around the implant, which secures it in place. While integration is taking place, your dentist may provide you with a temporary tooth to cover the opening where the implant was placed. Your dentist will also work with a laboratory to have a crown (replacement tooth) made to match the color, shape and size of your other teeth.

2. **Abutment**—Once the implant is secure in your jaw, your dentist will place an abutment (a small extension) on top of the implant. This small piece of metal extends up through your gumline. If your dentist uses a single-stage implant, you will not need this second step. With single-stage, the abutment is already attached to the implant.
3. **Crown**—At this phase, the dentist places the replacement tooth on top of the abutment, and secures it in place. The crown will extend below your gumline to look like a natural tooth.⁵

Once the crown is placed, you may need to visit your dentist a few more times to get the fit just right. Follow-up care is important for the long-term success of your dental implant. Your dentist will discuss a plan for at-home care and follow-up dental visits to help keep your implant, and all your teeth, healthy.

What is the AAP and what do they say about dental implants?

AAP is the American Academy of Periodontology, an association of dental professionals who “specialize in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of diseases affecting the gums and supporting structures of the teeth and in the placement and maintenance of dental implants.” According to the AAP, dental implants are a great solution to missing teeth—they look and feel like your own teeth, giving you comfort and confidence; they’re not dependent on your other teeth for support (as with a dental bridge) so you can preserve the oral health of your original teeth; and they free you from the messy pastes and insecurities of dentures.⁶

Questions to ask your dentist about dental implants:

- Am I a candidate for dental implants? Why or why not?
- I’d like to understand what my potential costs will be. Can you please obtain a pre-treatment estimate from my dental insurance carrier?
- If I decide to get a dental implant, what changes to my routine dental care will I need to make?

¹ American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons. “Dental Implants: Anatomy of a Dental Implant,” http://www.aaoms.org/dental_implants.php. Accessed 6/11/10.

² American Academy of Periodontology. “Dental Implants: The Permanent Solution for Tooth Loss,” <http://www.perio.org/consumer/2m.htm>. Accessed 6/11/10.

³ Arturo Sánchez-Pérez, M.J. Moya-Villaescusa, and R.G. Caffesse. “Tobacco as a Risk Factor for Survival of Dental Implants,” *Journal of Periodontology*, 2007, Vol. 78, No. 2, Pages 351-359.

⁴ American Dental Association. “Bisphosphonate Medication,” <http://ada.org/3045.aspx?currentTab=1>. Accessed 6/11/10.

⁵ American Academy of Periodontology. “Dental Implant Placement Options,” <http://perio.org/consumer/2mb.htm>. Accessed 6/11/10.

⁶ American Academy of Periodontology. “Who We Are,” <http://perio.org/about/who.html>. Accessed 6/11/10.

This brochure is intended for your general knowledge. This information is not a substitute for visiting a dentist nor does this information replace advice given to you by your physician or dentist. By making this information available to you, MetLife is not engaged in rendering any medical or dental advice.