

Dental Implants Part I

By Dr. Chiann Fan Gibson

When you lose a tooth or several teeth, what options do you have to restore the space?

The first three options include a removable appliance - such as partial denture, a bridge or an interim removable appliance - such as a nesbit or flipper, which is a temporary partial denture. These options are often quicker to implement, but can be cumbersome and certainly not as comfortable as your own natural teeth. Therefore, a forth option to consider is a dental implant, which is the ideal consideration if you qualify (most like your real tooth), with the advent of high-tech dentistry.

A dental implant is an artificial tooth root that a periodontist or an oral surgeon places into your jaw to restore a missing tooth or teeth. They are permanent and made of titanium posts that are surgically placed into the jawbone. I realize that this sounds horribly barbaric, but I can assure you from my own personal experience (I just had an implant placed in my mouth this month) that it's not nearly as painful as it sounds. In fact in my experience, I needed no prescribed pain medication at all.

Once the implant is placed in your mouth, an implant crown, implant supported bridgework or implant supported full denture is then placed on the top of the artificial tooth root (implant). The final result is that dental implants are very natural looking and feel like your own tooth/teeth after they are restored.

Another advantage of having dental implants is that you don't have to compromise the adjacent teeth in front and behind the missing tooth/teeth as needed for a traditional bridge. Sometimes bridgeworks, especially for the front teeth, may not look as natural or esthetic. This can be disappointing and ultimately affect how you feel about yourself. It would be the same as hiding your smile because of spaces from missing teeth.

Dental implants also help to prevent bone loss and gum recession (a very important part of keeping all your teeth) because they are integrated into your own bone structure. So you should brush and floss implant teeth like your own teeth. Of course, like any traditional crown, bridgework or any work done in the mouth, the implant crowns, implant bridgeworks or implant dentures are subject to the normal wear and tear processes with time.

For those who have dentures, an implant-supported bridgework or an implant-supported denture could also be considered. Implant options

can ultimately provide a more secure and comfortable feeling.

Surgical implant placement usually requires only a single visit with a local anesthetic. Sometimes a sedative is given with larger cases and with the patient's needs. There are occasions when the implants may require two surgical procedures. Your specialist will determine your needs the best.

As I already mentioned, recently I lost a back molar due to a fractured tooth with a failed root canal (done by a dentist while in high school in Washington). Let me just say that it is quite traumatic to lose a tooth. It is not so much the process of extracting the tooth that was upsetting to me, but the idea of losing a tooth. Whatever the age or lifestyle or profession you are in, losing a tooth is not easy to accept. Because of my knowledge about implant dentistry and what I have provided to my patients, I knew the only choice of treatment I would consider is a single tooth implant.

With the expertise skills of Dr. John Micaletti and Dr. Robert Pick (both Naperville periodontists) I have been provided with an excellent experience in receiving a dental implant. As a dentist who has now experienced the loss of a tooth and has followed with the implant placement, I can honestly say that it is truly painless and a great way to go with restoring a missing tooth.