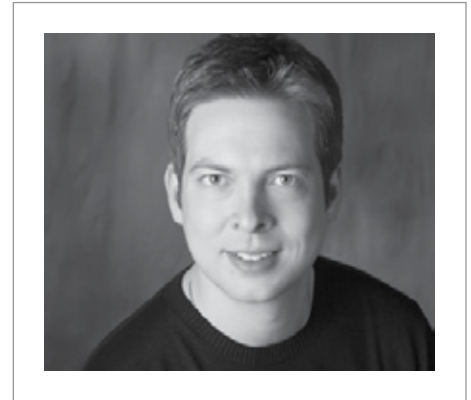


Dental Implants: *Your Questions Answered*

By Thomas Jackson, DDS

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Tooth replacement is one of the most common requests made by patients seeking dental care. Whether the tooth was lost from an accident, periodontal disease, or extensive dental decay, there are many reasons to replace the tooth or teeth. Historically, teeth that were either removable or used adjacent teeth were the only options for replacement. Today however, dental implants have become routine. Every day, I answer many questions and try to change misconceptions about dental implants. Here are some of the questions I receive.

What are dental implants and how are they used?

A dental implant is an artificial tooth root that is placed into the jawbone to support a tooth, bridge, or denture. Dental implants are made from titanium, and once healed, they become a permanent part of the jaw. A single dental implant can replace a single tooth, or when several adjacent teeth are missing, implants can be configured to support them. In addition, multiple dental implants can eliminate the need for removable dentures by providing teeth that do not need to come out for cleaning. Finally, several dental implants can be used to stabilize a complete denture, eliminating the use of adhesives, which provides better chewing function and comfort.

What are the advantages of dental implants?

The greatest advantage is that dental implants do not require the preparation of adjacent teeth, which would be necessary in a dental bridge. Studies show that the average life span of a dental bridge is between 10 to 15 years. A dental implant will never get decay, nor will it need a root canal, so dental implants are often life-long restorations. Other advantages include the ability to prevent bone loss.

Who is a candidate for dental implants?

Many patients will tell me that they are too old for dental implants. Old age is not a factor that will prevent the use of dental implants. The most common reason that implants may not be recommended is the amount of available bone. A successful dental implant requires an adequate volume of bone in all three dimensions. When a tooth is lost, there may be a loss of jawbone due to a phenomenon known as alveolar atrophy. If the atrophy is severe enough, an implant cannot be placed. The good news is that we have many routine procedures that can not only prevent alveolar atrophy, but also can replace the bone that has been lost.

Other common reasons that dental implants may not be recommended include uncontrolled diabetes, impaired wound healing, actively growing facial jaw growth, or any other health condition that would restrict minor oral surgery.

Who places the dental implant and the teeth?

The placement of a dental implant requires surgical training. A periodontist is a surgeon who has not only been trained in the placement of dental implants but also in the management of the gum tissue around them to provide excellent cosmetic results. The restoration of a dental implant requires certain knowledge of mechanics and occlusion (the way teeth come together). Most prosthodontists and many general dentists have the ability to restore dental implants. Some dental offices have the ability to surgically place the dental implant, and then restore them with teeth afterwards.

Are dental implants painful?

The placement of a dental implant requires a minor oral surgical procedure. For the procedure itself, the use of dental anesthetics eliminates any discomfort. IV sedation is

Thomas Jackson, DDS, is advanced trained in periodontics and periodontal prosthesis. Dr. Jackson is a board-certified periodontist and the founder of the Chicago Center For Cosmetic & Implant Dentistry. He lectures nationally and internationally on issues relating to dental implants and cosmetics. Dr. Jackson is an associate professor at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine, and he may be reached at 847-842-6900.

also a very common option to eliminate any anxiety and discomfort. As in any surgery, there may be discomfort after the procedure. Once implant healing is complete, there is no pain associated with a successfully placed dental implant.

How long does it take for a dental implant to heal?

Over the past 30 years of modern dental implants, technology has reduced the healing time of some dental implants to as little as six weeks (during the first generation of dental implants, healing could take up to four to six months).

I lost my teeth to periodontal disease. Can I have dental implants?

The placement of dental implants requires good overall oral health; therefore, any remaining teeth must be healthy. According to studies, however, there is no reason to believe that prior tooth loss from periodontal disease is related to implant loss. U