



# ARE DENTAL IMPLANTS RIGHT FOR YOU?

What You Need To Know  
**A Guide to Dental Implants**

By

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# SMILE CONFIDENTLY WITH DENTAL IMPLANTS

## Are You Confident In Your Smile?



It is estimated 70% of the population is missing at least 1 tooth or more. Commonly this is the result of advanced tooth decay, periodontal disease, trauma, excessive wear, failure of previous treatment, or congenital abnormalities.

Dental implants are a possible solution for this problem and there are many things to consider when thinking about them as an option for tooth replacement. We will discuss their history, advantages and disadvantages, various types of dental implants, and their costs. Also the procedures themselves, what makes someone a candidate for dental implants or not, their success rates, and what research is being done today.

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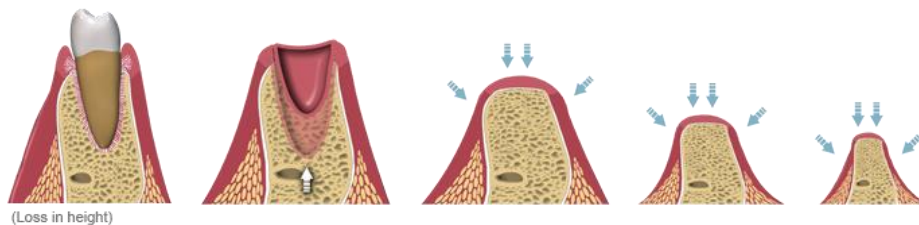
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## TOOTH REPLACEMENT - IS IT EVEN NECESSARY?

In today's society, most people would not want to be seen by others with a tooth visibly missing from their smile. The less obvious question may be whether to replace a tooth that is unseen. Are there any other consequences of having a missing tooth or teeth?

The evidence is quite clear that losing one or more teeth sets off a series of events that can be harmful to us. Teeth undergo movement called migration when adjacent teeth are lost. The neighboring teeth tilt into the space left by the missing tooth. The opposing teeth can move as well. With no tooth remaining to stop it, the opposing teeth undergo movement toward the space called over eruption. A single missing tooth can lead to movement of as many as 5 other surrounding teeth. And this can happen after the loss of just 1 tooth, think of what can happen with the loss of 2, 3, 4, or more teeth.

Another event that occurs after a tooth is lost is called bone atrophy. This is the process where the jawbone starts to disappear because it lacks the stimulation that the missing tooth and root once gave it. Our bone is a dynamic tissue that undergoes growth and remodeling depending on the forces and stimulation placed upon it. As a result of a lack of adequate tooth and facial bone support our facial tissues begin to show a "caved in" look, giving the appearance of premature aging.



These events that result from tooth loss can occur in just a few short years. And if that isn't bad enough, these changes may make it impossible to ever replace the missing teeth in the future, making these undesirable results of tooth loss permanent.

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## TOOTH REPLACEMENT OPTIONS

Today there are 3 main options for tooth replacement. They are a removable partial or full denture, a fixed (cemented) bridge, and a dental implant. Comparisons can be made in terms of comfort, cost, longevity, and tissue preservation.



Partial and full dentures are removable by the patient and tend to be fairly unstable during function and therefore are rated least comfortable by patients. The longevity of dentures is the least of the three options as is their degree of tissue preservation. They do nothing to preserve the jaw bone; in fact they are a contributing factor in the loss of bone. The forces and movement of the partial and full dentures on the gums and underlying bone help speed up the loss of the wearer's jawbone. However there is a little bit of good news, partial and full dentures is the least costly alternative for tooth replacement.

The fixed bridge has its pros and cons as well. It is now considered the intermediate choice in a comparison of the three methods of tooth replacement. It beats the removable dentures in all categories except for cost. A key consideration in choosing a fixed bridge is the adjacent teeth need to be "prepared" or cut down in order to attach it. This often involves teeth that otherwise wouldn't need any treatment at all or perhaps they may have even been previously untreated altogether. Also, the fixed bridge does nothing to help preserve the bone at the site of the missing tooth.

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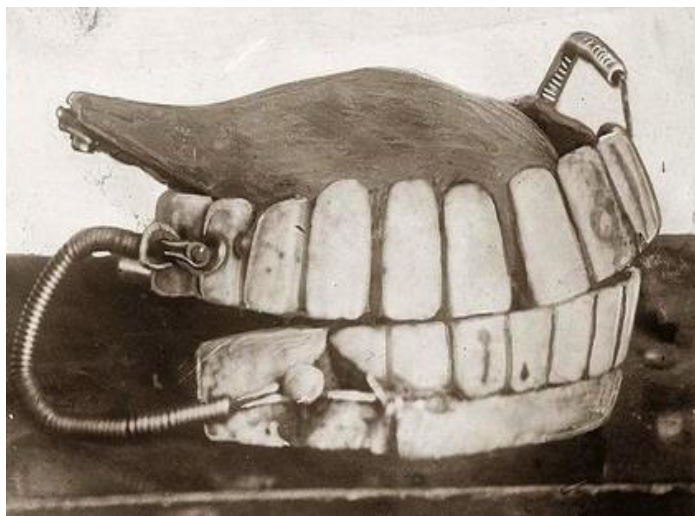
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The most costly of the 3 options, the dental implant is now considered to be the standard against which the other choices for tooth replacement are compared. This has not always been the case. In the past there had been some controversy about which had the better longevity, the fixed bridge or the dental implant. Being the newest of the 3 tooth replacement options, it took a while for the dental implant to develop its clinical track record. But today the evidence is undeniable, all the latest research shows the single tooth dental implant outlasts the 3 tooth fixed bridge. Best of all, the research also shows the dental implant helps preserve the jaw bone in the areas in which they are placed.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF DENTAL IMPLANTS

Dental implants are known to have existed centuries ago. Archeologists have discovered seashells carved into the shape of teeth implanted into the jawbones of people from the Mayan civilization. Also, the ancient Egyptians were found to have implanted copper studs into the jawbones of some of their people in order to affix artificial teeth to them.



More recently, in the last century or so, many attempts have been made experimentally to implant teeth into the jaw with many different materials of various shapes and sizes. The biggest breakthrough occurred by accident, in 1951, when a Swedish researcher found the titanium cylinders he had placed to help study bone growth in animals were very difficult to remove. They had fused to the surrounding bone, a

phenomenon called osseointegration or integration for short.

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This visionary researcher, Dr. Per Ingvar Branemark, was also an orthopedic surgeon and he realized the potential of his discovery. Dr. Branemark spent the next 3 decades experimenting and studying the use of titanium cylinders as dental implants. He finally presented his findings in 1981 and shortly thereafter in the mid 1980's, titanium dental implants became commercially available. Today Dr. Branemark is considered the father of modern implant dentistry.

## AM I A CANDIDATE FOR DENTAL IMPLANTS?

Several factors influence an individual's suitability for dental implants. First, is there enough space available for the implant to fit? Is the gap left by the missing tooth wide enough? Is there enough room for the entire length of the implant? Second, the quality or density of the bone needs to be suitable. Is the candidate's bone more like balsa wood or oak? CT scans are very helpful in assessing these factors, especially when evaluating the bony attributes is a tough call.



Although the CT scan is an added cost and not everyone needs a CT scan, it does take the guesswork out of determining a person's bone quantity and quality. Today the good news is, due to the advances in bone regeneration and bone grafting techniques, many people who once were not good candidates for dental implants can now become successful dental implant patients.

Dental implants should not be placed in children or adolescents who have not reached their full physical maturity, when bone growth is complete. Certain medical conditions such as uncontrolled diabetes, heart disease, or periodontal disease will prevent the

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safe placement of dental implants and are not advised until these conditions are treated or under control.

Overall, the 5-year success rate for placement and restoration of regular diameter titanium root form dental implants is greater than 95%, depending on what literature is read or what particular study is quoted. The important thing to realize is that nothing's 100%, but implants are one of the most successful treatments in all of dentistry.



Generally, the way implants fail is somehow they loosen up and can no longer support the replacement teeth. Selection of the placement site or location of the implants is critical. If the desired site is not adequate for some reason, then every effort needs to be made to make it suitable or else another location or method needs to be considered.

Compromising on the conditions of the implant placement site is a set up for failure. This is where the previously mentioned bone regeneration and bone grafting procedures can be very useful, or sometimes even imperative. Another common reason for failure is the implant may be left unstable or movable at the time of placement. Also, the types of replacement teeth used and the nature of the forces placed on the teeth and implants are key factors in the long term success or failure of the dental implant restoration.

Some type of uncontrolled systemic condition can also contribute to implant failure. With all this talk of dental implant failure an important thing to remember is that

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almost everyone, in the hands of skilled and experienced dental professionals, can achieve success in dental implant placement and tooth replacement. I know from personal experience in my own dental practice, of the hundreds of implant supported tooth replacements I have been involved in, less than a handful has failed, and of those that did, all were replaced at no additional fee to the patient and they became successful as well.

## ARE THERE DIFFERENT TYPES OF DENTAL IMPLANTS?

Today's dental implant manufacturers provide a wide variety of implant designs and configurations to meet the needs of dental professionals and their patients. Since the mid 1980's, when titanium root form implants first became available, many implant designs, implant manufacturers, and implant systems have come and gone. Today just a handful of dental implant manufacturers have come to possess the major share of the implant market. They each have their own product lines, but in the end they all perform similarly; they all work. Basically, each of the manufacturers is trying to meet the same needs for a doctor and patient. They all are titanium cylinders that integrate to the patient's jaw to support some type of tooth replacement.



Implant replacing a single tooth



Replacing several teeth



Replacing all teeth

There is no evidence that any one brand of root form dental implant performs better than another. Each of the major manufacturers make a full line of products and each have products and systems to solve just about any tooth replacement need. When innovations of significance occur all the companies move quickly to incorporate them into their product mix. Many dental professionals primarily use one or two brands or product lines based on convenience or their experience rather than any one brand working better than another.

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Where the dental implant tooth replacements differ is mainly in the type of tooth replacement attached to the implants. Is it a single tooth or multi tooth replacement? Is the replacement designed to be cemented and fixed in place? Or is it designed to be able to be removed by the patient? How many implants would be needed? Most people believe that they need one dental implant for each tooth they are missing, but this isn't necessarily so.

Some implants are designed to fit beneath dentures to stabilize and support them. Each option has its pros and cons and should be designed specifically with each individual's needs and conditions in mind. Recently, mini implants have come on to the dental implant scene. Mini implants are very narrow diameter implants used for very small teeth or for use in areas where the available bone is very narrow. First developed and approved for use as temporary or transitional devices to support replacement teeth while a more permanent solution was planned and carried out.

Now a limited number of mini implants types have been approved for longer term usage. Mini dental implants tend to be lower in cost than the wider diameter root form implants because of their ease in placement. However, this cost savings is often lost due to the fact, in general, twice as many mini implants are needed for equivalent support given by a regular diameter root form implant. At this time mini implants can provide a good solution to a limited number of implant placement applications.

## HOW ARE DENTAL IMPLANTS PLACED?

The placement of dental implants can be done in the dental office, hospitalization is not necessary. Simply, a pilot hole is made, the channel is widened to correspond to the implant diameter, and the implant is screwed in to place. Generally, the dental implant is allowed to integrate in place for 2-4 months with no replacement tooth or load put on it. After integration, the replacement tooth or teeth are made and put into place.

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In recent years, the so called immediate load dental implant placement procedures have been accomplished, where a tooth replacement is attached to the implant the same day the implanted is inserted, that is, before integration has taken place. This method works well for those situations where immediate tooth

replacement is desired, for example in the front of the mouth.

Care must be taken in the selection of those cases where immediate loading of the dental implant is done. Two key factors in the placement of implants that are loaded immediately are: the implant must be fully stable with no movement at the time of placement and the replacement tooth must be in a location where the individual's biting forces can be controlled and minimized.

## WHAT ABOUT THE COST? IS IT EXPENSIVE?

Tooth replacement with dental implants can become expensive. Depending on factors such as how many teeth need to be replaced, how many implants are required, or what may need to be done with the proposed placement sites to help make them suitable for implant placement. It should be mentioned here that it is almost always less costly to restore the existing natural teeth whenever possible, and this should be the first option explored when planning dental restorative treatment.



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However, dental implant tooth replacement may be more affordable and attainable than most people think. Let's take the example of a single tooth replacement. The two phases of treatment, the implant placement and integration phase along with the tooth replacement phase using an implant abutment post and crown can add up to nearly \$5,000. With an extended payment plan, this can come out to a payment of less than \$100 per month and is within the price range for most people. But what if you need more than one? Remember, not every single lost or missing tooth requires a one-for-one implant substitution to replace it, so don't count yourself out.

## WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF DENTAL IMPLANTS?

At this point in the evolution of tooth replacement with dental implants, we pretty



much know how to place dental implants successfully and restore the missing teeth. Where the challenge lies is in predictably preserving the bony and soft tissue around the implant and replacement teeth each and every single time a dental implant is placed. This tissue preservation is a key element in having the implant-tooth complex look like a real tooth that is esthetically pleasing and keeping it that way.

Most of the time we can get excellent results, but sometimes due to pre-existing conditions and prior tissue loss this can be very challenging. Dental professionals and researchers are striving to get excellent results for patients all the time, not just most of the time. Most of today's research and product development in the world of dental implants focuses not only on tissue preservation but on tissue regeneration - the formation of the new tissue. Also, work is always being done on ways to get patients their implants in place and their missing teeth restored faster and faster.

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Almost all of the advances and innovations in implant dentistry come gradually and need much testing. So if you are considering waiting for something significantly better to come along in the short term, it is not likely. Don't forget every day you wait to replace a missing tooth the surrounding teeth are moving and precious supporting bone is being lost.

**“Dental implant tooth replacement may be more affordable and attainable than most people think... With an extended payment plan, this can come out to a payment of less than \$100 per month.”**

## CONCLUSION

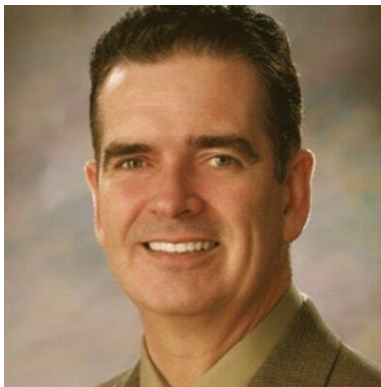
Today, tooth replacement with dental implants is the standard for replacement of those teeth that can no longer be restored or are already missing. The choice to replace missing teeth with dental implants is an individual one.

If in doubt about whether they would work for you, seek the advice of a competent and experienced dental professional to guide you through the decision-making process. Don't let inaccurate information or ideas prevent you from getting the best possible care. Seek treatment that is specifically planned for you and addresses your particular concerns, conditions, and needs.

**Dental implants will restore your oral health, your functionality, but most importantly your confidence.**

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## ABOUT DR. DAVID F. GRACE, DMD



Dr. David Grace provides uncompromising care you can trust. He has dedicated his career to learning new and innovative techniques that will make your experience with him a pleasure. With over a quarter-century of experience, he spends hundreds of hours keeping up-to-date in all phases of dentistry.

Over 25 Years of Smile Enhancement Experience

D.M.D.: Tufts University School of Dental Medicine in Boston

Fellow: Academy of General Dentistry

Member: American Academy of Implant Dentistry, American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry, American Dental Association, Massachusetts Dental Society, Dental Organization for Conscious Sedation

Alumni: Pankey Institute for Advanced Dental Education

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