

# Dental Implants

Are they an option for you?

## Dental Implants

Nothing can take the place of a healthy set of teeth, but when disease or an accident ends in tooth loss, it's good to know that there are options for restoring your smile. If you are self-conscious because you have missing teeth or you wear dentures, there is an alternative: dental implants.

Implants have been used for more than a quarter century. And more patients are choosing dental implants as a replacement option, according to the American Dental Association. One survey shows that more than 1.5 million dental implants were placed in a recent year, and that number is expected to grow.

Many patients choose implants to replace a single tooth, several teeth, or to support a full set of dentures. Implants are cylinders that are surgically placed in the upper or lower jaw where they function as a sturdy anchor for replacement teeth. They are made of titanium and other materials that are compatible with the human body.



Missing central incisor



Central incisor after dental implant

## What's involved?

The placement of an implant generally is a three-part process that takes several months.

**In the first step**, the dentist surgically places the implant into the jaw, with the top of the implant slightly above the top of the bone. A screw is inserted into the implant to prevent gum tissue and other debris from entering.

The gum is then secured over the implant, where it will remain covered for approximately three to six months while the implant fuses with the bone, a process called osseointegration. There may be some swelling and/or tenderness after the surgery, so pain medication is usually prescribed to alleviate the discomfort. Your dentist may recommend a diet of soft foods, cold foods and warm soup during the healing process.

**In the second step**, the implant is uncovered and the dentist attaches a post, also called an abutment, to the implant. The gum tissue is allowed to heal around the post. Once healed, the implant and post serve as the foundation for the new tooth. With some implants, this step is not needed because the implant and post are all one unit.

**In the third and final step**, the dentist makes a custom artificial tooth, called a dental crown, based on a size, shape, color and fit that will blend with your other teeth. Once completed, the crown is attached to the implant post.