



Dental Notes

By Joseph P. Matrullo, DMD

Dental implants are structures that are placed firmly into the bone in the mouth. These devices act as substitutes for natural tooth roots, and they have numerous potential uses. For example, in complex orthodontic cases they can be used as anchors to aid in the movement of teeth.

Dental implants may also offer solutions for those patients who cannot function adequately with conventional dentures or removable partial dentures. Any denture can be fitted to snap onto implants so the patient won't need to rely on clasps or suction to hold the dentures in place.

For those people who desire to avoid removable dentures altogether, implants can be used to hold permanent replacement teeth in place, whether they may be single crowns or multiple-unit bridgework.

In all these scenarios, implants can provide the needed support for improved appearance, speech, comfort, and the ability to chew and enjoy food. Physiologically, dental implants are important for those who cannot adjust to the idea of removable dentures because they allow patients to function as if they never lost teeth in the first place.

In most cases placing dental implants is a simple procedure that can be done right in the dentist's office, usually in one or two visits. Most people report only minor discomfort, no different than that felt after the simple removal of a tooth. After healing from the placement of the implant, additional visits will then be necessary to construct the replacement teeth that will fasten to these implants. In many cases, temporary teeth can be worn while initial healing takes place and the final teeth are being made. During the whole process there is little disruption of one's normal business and social activities.

How long the implant will last depends primarily on personal habits, dental history, and medical history, all of which affect the nature of the existing bone structure. Most of the responsibility for a successful outcome lies with the patient, as proper oral hygiene is crucial for implants to succeed. Proper brushing, flossing, and rinsing, as well as regular periodic checkups are essential. When the procedure is planned properly, there is only a very small chance that the body may reject the implant. Dental implants are made of tissue-compatible materials, leaving very little possibility of an allergic reaction in the body.

If you feel you are a candidate for implants, please see your dentist for a consultation which usually consists of a comprehensive dental examination, medical history, and radiographic exam. In some instances, models of your mouth may be taken. After the evaluation the dentist will recommend to you the appropriate course of treatment.

Remember: The healthier you are the better the chance of a favorable result!

I would like to thank the many readers of ShopInRI for all their interesting questions. If you have a dental question you would like addressed in a future column, please mail it to me at the address below.

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