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NHS Grampian

Dental implants

Information for patients and carers

Department of Restorative Dentistry
Aberdeen Dental Hospital

What are dental implants?

Implants are titanium screws placed into the jaw bone that act as an artificial replacement for the roots of teeth. Replacement teeth including crowns, bridges or dentures can then be attached to the implants.

Can anyone have implants?

Implant treatment on the NHS is only available in specific circumstances such as:

- to help people born with missing teeth;
- after significant dental trauma which restricts other treatment options; or
- for people who need rehabilitation after surgery to treat mouth cancer.

If you are not eligible for NHS implant treatment, you may wish to seek treatment in the private sector.

You must have good dental health before we can consider implant treatment. Your mouth must be free from infection and your remaining teeth and gums should be in good condition.

There are several medical conditions that may prevent successful implant treatment. Implant failure is also more likely in smokers. People who smoke are not eligible for NHS implant treatment.

We will check your jaw to ensure there is enough bone to place the implant. If there is not enough bone, implant treatment may not be possible.

Sometimes we may be able to increase the amount of bone (bone grafting) by using various surgical techniques. We commonly use bone substitutes from animal sources such as cows or pigs.

Alternative methods of increasing the amount of bone may also be required and will be discussed if needed.

Can implants fail? How long do they last?

Studies have shown that dental implants have a 97% success rate after 10 years. However, a small number of dental implants may fail shortly after placement and some may fail many years later.

It is likely over time that the replacement tooth, teeth or dentures that attach to the implant(s) will need replaced. Normally, the responsibility for replacement restorations or implants, including the costs, stays with the patient.

It is important to look after your implant(s) and follow the advice given to you by the dentist.

How long will my treatment take?

You will need multiple appointments. The whole process, (especially if you need bone grafting to increase the amount of bone) can take over a year.

Any complications could extend this time further.

How is implant treatment performed?

Before your treatment

We have to plan carefully before implant treatment takes place. You will need a detailed examination, which will including taking impressions of your mouth and X-rays.

First stage of treatment – implant placement

The first stage of treatment involves placing the implants into your jaw bone. This is usually done under local anaesthetic which means using an injection to numb the area of your mouth.

We make a cut in your gum and screw the implant into a carefully prepared site in your jaw. We then use stitches to secure the gum either over or around the implant. This stage of treatment can take one to two hours depending on how many implants you need.

If there is not enough bone to place the implant, the amount of bone can be increased by carrying out bone grafting. This usually involves placing bone substitutes that come from cows and pigs to help grow new bone.

It can take between six and nine months for the new bone to form before we can place the implant. Sometimes bone grafting can be carried out at the same time as placing the implant.

After this first surgery, you may have some swelling, bleeding, bruising and discomfort. We will give you instructions on caring for your mouth to reduce the risk of infection. You will need to use a special mouthwash and avoid brushing the area. **It is very important to follow these instructions.**

We will organise an appointment for you a week after your surgery to review healing and remove the stitches.

If you wear a denture to replace your missing teeth, we usually adjust it or make a different type of denture for you to wear after your surgery.

We ask some people, especially if they wear a complete denture that replaces all of their teeth, to leave this out for a few weeks to allow healing.

What happens next?

If the implants are buried at the time of placement they are left under the gum for a few months to allow the bone to attach to the implants before they are uncovered.

If the implants have been put in without any bone grafting this may be two to three months. If bone grafting was carried out at the same time it may be closer to six months.

We make another cut in your gum over the top of the implant to expose the top. A healing collar, usually made out of metal, is placed on your implant so that it protrudes through your gum which is stitched around it. This is also done under local anaesthetic.

We will organise an appointment for you a week after your surgery to review healing and remove the stitches. At this stage, we will also show you how to clean your implants. It's very important you do this thoroughly.

When are the replacement teeth fitted?

After two to three months, your gums should have healed around the implants. At this stage, we take impressions so that your replacement teeth (which may be crowns, bridges or dentures) can be made. You will need several appointments to do this.

After we have fitted your replacement teeth, you must keep your implants clean using special brushes and floss every day.

You will also need regular appointments with your dentist and hygienist to monitor and maintain your implants.

Treatment with implants is a lifetime commitment for you. You must clean your implants thoroughly and have regular check-ups at your own dentist to monitor your implants.

Any ongoing maintenance, such as cleaning around your implants, will be carried out by your own dentist and/or hygienist and usually involves a charge.

NHS dental implants placed at Aberdeen Dental Hospital are guaranteed for one year after the completion of treatment. Any problems during this time with implants or replacement teeth that attach to them would be treated by our team.

After this time, there is no longer a guarantee to NHS funded treatment and you are expected to cover the costs of any necessary treatment yourself, which would involve seeing a dentist in the private sector.

Are there any disadvantages to implant treatment?

Implant and bone grafting surgery can cause pain, swelling, bleeding and bruising.

Pain after the surgery can usually be managed with normal painkillers that you would take for a headache. Any swelling or bruising tends to settle after a week or so.

There is also a risk of developing an infection after surgery which could result in failure of the implant or bone graft. This is reduced by ensuring you keep the area clean with the special mouthwash we gave you.

There is also a risk of damaging natural teeth that may be close to the area where surgery is being carried out, or nerves in certain areas of your mouth that can cause numbness.

We plan your treatment carefully to reduce these risks as much as possible, and your dentist will discuss with you if they think that this is more likely in your case.

Are there any alternatives?

There may be alternatives to implant treatment for you. Your dentist will discuss these so you can weigh up the advantages and disadvantages.

Alternatives may include using removable dentures to replace missing teeth. If you have problems with your dentures, the fit of these can often be improved by taking care with their design. Denture fixatives can also be used to help keep complete dentures in place.

If you still have remaining natural teeth, it may be possible to replace missing teeth by attaching them to the remaining natural teeth on either side of the gap. These teeth are permanently fixed in your mouth and are called a bridge.

Some people do not have any problems from missing teeth, especially if they are at the back of their mouth. It may be better not to replace these teeth at all.

Contact telephone number

If you have any queries about your treatment, please call:

Reception

Restorative Dentistry Department

Aberdeen Dental Hospital

Foresterhill

☎ 01224 552707

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Feedback from the public helped us to develop this leaflet. If you have any comments on how we can improve it, please call 01224 554149 to let us know.

Restorative Dentistry
Aberdeen Dental Hospital
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