

What is an implant?

An implant is a replacement tooth like prosthesis that will replace either a single or multiple missing teeth. The implant is divided into two components. 1) the surgical part – which is the titanium screw that is placed by your surgeon (either a periodontist or oral surgeon) into the bone underneath the gum

The implant crown/s is the tooth shaped prosthesis that is attached to this titanium screws and the part that you will see in your mouth.



Why do I need an implant?

Often an implant is recommended because either a tooth is defective beyond repair or a tooth has been lost, and you would like it replaced. There are other replacement options such as a denture or a bridge, however, sometimes the teeth on either side are not suitable for a bridge or denture. Implants are also recommended when there is not enough teeth to support a bridge, or if there is not enough retention for a removable denture (these implants act as “clips” to help hold the denture in). Also sometimes because of personal preference, you may decide you would prefer an implant.

Will my implant last forever?

The simple answer to this is no. However, the dental research shows that implants tend to last a lot longer than other replacement options such as dentures and bridges. However, these are very broad assumptions and based on averages.

How long your implant lasts can depend on (but not limited to) the following: -

- Where the missing space is
- How many teeth are missing and how much gum is missing
- What the quality and quantity of your bone is
- Your medical condition
- The surgical placement of the titanium implant screw
- How well the implant crown was fabricated and fitted
- The material of the crown
- How well you look after it
- The health of the gum and surrounding teeth
- The forces that are transmitted to the tooth

So it is very hard to give an exact figure as to how long your implant will last.

What is the procedure for an implant?

1) Often, the first appointment you have is with the prosthodontist, to determine if an implant is suitable for you, how many implants are needed, types of implants needed and location of implants needed.

Also if we are replacing a tooth in a aesthetic area, you may need a temporary device such as a temporary denture, to wear whilst the surgical phase is being carried out and healing occurs. If this is the case, you will have moulds taken prior to any defective tooth/teeth being extracted, and the temporary denture will be made and ready to insert on the day you have the tooth/teeth removed.

2) You will be referred to the surgeon/periodontist (if you have not been so already). The surgeon will take preliminary scans to determine the availability of the quantity of bone, and also the quality. An implant requires sufficient bone encasing the whole screw so this is determined initially by scans. This will give you an idea of your suitability for an implant. The surgeon will discuss the surgical phase and if you need any bone adjunctive therapy (such as grafting) and will go through this whole process prior to doing any treatment. Once you have agreed on the procedure the surgeon will take the defective teeth out (if they are still present) and either place the titanium implant screws on the same day, or wait some time for healing before placing the titanium screw – again this will be determined by your surgeon.

After the day of the removal of your tooth/teeth, you may need to see the prosthodontist to have some adjustments as often the temporary denture may not fit perfectly due to swelling in the area.

3) DEPENDING ON THE BONE QUALITY AND QUANTITY, YOU WILL NEED TO WAIT APPROXIMATELY 8-12 WEEKS. This allows for “osseointegration” – this is where the bone surrounding the titanium screw fuses into the screw so it becomes one with the bone. You will see the surgeon for a “torque test” which is where they determine that the implant has indeed fused. If it is successful, then you are ready to see the prosthodontist.

Then you will see the prosthodontist to start the prosthodontics phase of implant.
The number of appointments depends on what we are replacing.

For single implant crowns

First appointment

This appointment often doesn't require anaesthetic unless the implant has been placed deep underneath the gum. This involves removing a small cap that the surgeon has placed during the time of the torque test. This is usually at gum level. A small impression post is screwed onto the implant and a silicone mould is taken and the impression post gets embedded and removed with the mould. A mould of your opposing teeth and of your bite is also taken. The small cap is placed back and you will leave exactly as you arrived. We may take some photo's for front teeth for the shade.

***For front teeth, we may require you to attend our laboratory to have a more accurate colour match. Even with this matching, sometimes it is difficult to match to natural teeth and may require a few “try-ins” before we get an acceptable match. This may require more appointments whilst we try and retry the crown to ensure that we get the best aesthetic result for you.*

Second appointment

Again this usually does not require anaesthetic unless the implant has been placed deep in the gum. Anaesthetic is then given just to ease any pain on the gum area. The small gap on the implant is removed. The implant crown is attached to the implant (the titanium screw in your bone) via another screw called a “prosthesis screw”. This screw is usually accessed from the back of the crown in front teeth and from the top in posterior teeth. The prosthesis screw, screws into the centre of the titanium screw in your bone, via its internal threads. Once it is determined that the shape and aesthetics of the implant crown is satisfactory, the prosthesis screw is torqued to a specific value and the opening covered with resin composite. The bite will be checked and oral hygiene instructions will be given.

On the day of the insertion of the implant crown, you may feel it is very “tight”. This is done deliberately as it is because the implant is very solid and doesn't move like natural teeth, the contacts between the implant crown and natural

teeth are deliberately done more tighter than natural in order to prevent food packing. Also as the implant crown is much larger than the screw cap that used to be there, the gum also will be pushed out and thus will feel a bit uncomfortable for a few days. After a week or so, you should not notice any discomfort.

For cases where there are multiple or full mouth of implants

These often require 6-10 appointments, depending of the complexity of the case.

Each appointment may be a week or two apart.

Often we have to make frameworks for the prostheses for complex cases, and these are done by our laboratories in Melbourne. There are very limited laboratories that can manufacture these frameworks, and as a result, we are often dictated by their time schedules and availability of componentry. Also in multiple implant cases, it may require several try-in appointments to verify the fit, as it is crucial for implant prosthesis to have a precise fit, to minimise risks of complications in the future.

What are possible risks of having an implant?

Your surgeon will talk to you about the surgical risks of having an implant.

Whilst implant crowns have a high longevity rate in the dental literature, they do have a higher rate of complications due to more componentry that is present.

Some of the complications can included (but are not limited to) the following: -

- Loosening of the implant crown – this is usually common in the first year of implant placement due to the metal componentry “settling”.
- Loss of the composite resin restoration that is covering the screw access hole on the implant crown
- Screw fracture
- Implant fracture
- Chipping of the porcelain on the implant crown
- Ongoing pain or discomfort from adjacent teeth

Screw loosening is very easy to fix (provided it isn't a screw fracture) – it is also something that needs to be addressed asap as otherwise you can get wearing of the screw threads. It is a minor procedure and will not take long to retighten. Loss of the composite resin again is common, however, this is not an emergency and if you are unable to come in for some time, it is not a problem.

Complications are often unforeseen due to machined parts from manufacturers. Whilst utmost care is done to avoid complications, we cannot predict when and where these may occur as each person will react differently to having implant treatment.

How do I look after my implant?

It is important that you look after the implant to avoid risks of gum problems. Make sure you brush the crown and the rest of your teeth twice a day with a soft bristled toothbrush and also floss daily to prevent decay in between the teeth and underneath the crown margin. In short, you should look after the crowned tooth as you would your normal teeth. You should also floss once a week with Curasept Gel (as explained during your insertion appointment). This will ensure the gum remains healthy and less risks of gum infections around the implant. Regular dental check-ups and cleans will also ensure that your crowned tooth and teeth are kept into their optimal condition and any problems picked up and dealt with in a timely manner to avoid on going complications.

