

“All I Want For Christmas Are My Two Front Teeth...”

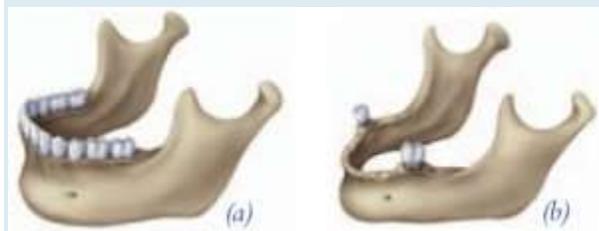
Now that you have that little ditty running through your head (you're welcome), think about the kids singing that song. In our appearance conscious society this phrase doesn't just apply to kids who have lost their baby teeth and have a gap-toothed smile! But we older members of society can't hope for new teeth to grow in, so we need to replace them somehow. We all have heard of bridges and partial dentures. Did you know that 69% of adults ages 35 to 44 have lost at least one permanent tooth to an accident, gum disease, a failed root canal or tooth decay? Furthermore, by age 74, 26% of adults have lost all of their permanent teeth.

Removable dentures may slip or cause embarrassing clicking sounds while eating or speaking. Of even greater concern, fixed bridges often affect adjacent healthy teeth, and removable dentures may lead to bone loss in the area where the tooth or teeth are missing. Recurrent decay, periodontal (gum) disease and other factors often doom fixed bridgework to early failure. For these reasons, fixed bridges and removable dentures usually need to be replaced every seven to 15 years.

A removable partial denture may contribute to the loss of adjacent teeth. Studies show that within five to seven years there is a failure rate of up to 30% in teeth located next to a fixed bridge or removable partial denture. Further, conventional dentures may contribute to the loss of bone in the area where teeth are missing. Most people who are missing a single tooth opt for a fixed bridge; but a bridge may require the cutting down of healthy, adjacent teeth that may or may not need to be restored in the future. Then there is the additional cost of possibly having to replace the bridge once, twice or more over the course of a lifetime. As illustration (a) indicates, the presence of natural teeth preserves the jawbone. When a tooth is missing, as in illustration (b), the bone may erode and weaken until it may be necessary to graft bone:



Fixed bridges may require the shaping or cutting down of adjacent healthy teeth.



Bone is maintained by the presence of natural teeth or implants (a). Bone loss occurs with the loss of teeth (b).

Instead of a bridge, partial or full denture many patients are looking at implants to restore their smile...and greatly improve their chewing ability. There are many advantages to dental implants, including:

- **Improved appearance.** Dental implants look and feel like your own teeth. And because they are designed to fuse with bone, they become permanent.
- **Improved speech.** With poor-fitting dentures, the teeth can slip within the mouth causing you to mumble or slur your words. Dental implants allow you to speak without the worry that your teeth might slip.
- **Improved comfort.** Because they become part of you, implants eliminate the discomfort of removable dentures.
- **Easier eating.** Sliding dentures can make chewing difficult. Dental implants function like your own teeth, allowing you to eat your favorite foods with confidence and without pain.
- **Improved self-esteem.** Dental implants can give you back your smile and help you feel better about yourself.
- **Improved oral health.** Dental implants don't require reducing other teeth, as a tooth-supported bridge does. Because nearby teeth are not altered to support the implant, more of your own teeth are left intact, improving your long-term oral health. Individual implants also allow easier access between teeth, improving oral hygiene.
- **Durability.** Implants are very durable and will last many years. With good care, many implants last a lifetime.
- **Convenience.** Removable dentures are just that; removable. Dental implants eliminate the embarrassing inconvenience of removing your dentures, as well as the need for messy adhesives to keep your dentures in place.

Dental implant success is related to operator skill, quality and quantity of the bone available at the site, and the patient's oral hygiene. The general consensus of opinion is that implants carry a success rate of around 95%. The main contributing factors to the success of dental implant placement, as with most surgical procedures, include the patient's overall general health and compliance with post-surgical care. Dental implants are not susceptible to dental caries but they can develop a condition called peri-implantitis. This is an inflammatory condition of the mucosa and/or bone around the implant which may result in bone loss and eventual loss of the implant. The condition is usually, but not always, associated with a chronic infection. Peri-implantitis is more likely to occur in heavy smokers, patients with diabetes, and patients with poor oral hygiene.

Are You a Candidate for Dental Implants? Whether you are a young, middle-aged or older adult; whether you need to replace one tooth, several teeth, or all your teeth, there is a dental implant solution for you. With the exception of growing children, dental implants are the solution of choice for people of all ages, even those with the following health concerns:

Existing Medical Conditions: If you can have routine dental treatment, you can generally have an implant placed. While precautions are advisable for certain conditions, patients with such chronic diseases as high blood pressure and diabetes are usually successful candidates for dental implant treatment.

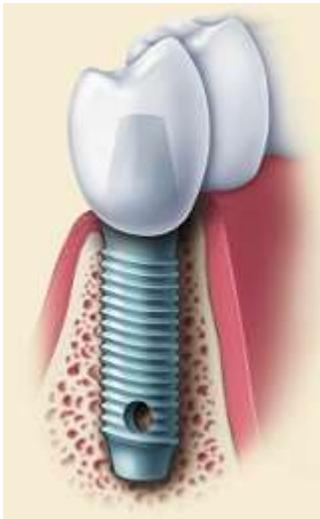
Gum Disease or Problem Teeth: Almost all implants placed in patients who have lost their teeth to periodontal disease or decay have been successful.

Currently Wearing Partial or Dentures: Implants can replace removable bridges or dentures, or they can be used to stabilize and secure the denture, making it much more comfortable.

Smokers: Although smoking lowers the success rate of implants, it doesn't eliminate the possibility of getting them.

Bone Loss: Bone loss is not uncommon for people who have lost teeth or had periodontal disease. Oral and maxillofacial surgeons are trained and experienced in grafting bone to safely and permanently secure the implant.

Anatomy of a Dental Implant:



A dental implant designed to replace a single tooth is composed of three parts: the titanium implant that fuses with the jawbone; the abutment, which fits over the portion of the implant that protrudes from the gum line; and the crown, which is created by a prosthodontist or restorative dentist and fitted onto the abutment for a natural appearance. When a missing tooth is replaced by a dental implant, the fusion, or osseointegration, of the implant and bone provides stability, just as the natural tooth did.

If you are missing several teeth in the same area of your mouth, you may still enjoy the confidence and lifestyle benefits that come with dental implants. The oral surgeon will place two or more dental implants, depending on the number of teeth that are missing. Your replacement teeth will be attached to the implants to allow excellent function and prevent bone loss. The implants will serve as a stable support that tightly locks into your replacement teeth and dentures to prevent slipping and bone loss.

And if you are missing all of your teeth implants can be placed to hold a permanent fixed bridge or a removable denture. The fixed bridge gives you a solution that replaces all of your missing teeth and does not need to be removed. A patient cleans the implants and artificial teeth just like real teeth: with a toothbrush, floss and paste. The removable denture clips very securely onto the implants or onto a bar that is attached to the implants. This gives you much better retention and function than a regular denture but is not as expensive as full mouth implant placement. In any case, with an overall success

rate of about 95% and almost 50 years of clinical research to back them up, dental implants are frequently the best treatment option for replacing missing teeth. So, can you hear that ditty...All I want for Christmas are my two front teeth??? Call your dentist today, or have HomeCare Dentists do a consultation. Chances are great that you can have implants to restore your smile!

(Excerpts from WebMD, Wikipedia, and the American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons)