



Patient Information Leaflet

Dental Implants

Cork University Dental
School & Hospital



This leaflet has been designed to explain what dental implants are and it contains answers to many frequently asked questions. If you have any other questions that the leaflet does not answer, or if you would like further information, please ask us.

What are dental implants?

Dental implants are used to help retain a crown, bridge or denture. They are made of titanium, which is a very safe material and is compatible with bone and gums. They are placed using a surgical procedure under local anaesthetic. Sometimes, we need more bone in the implant site, and this requires a bone graft. This procedure involves taking some bone from elsewhere in your mouth, and placing it in the area where you have a missing tooth or teeth. If required, this procedure may be undertaken whilst you are asleep (under general anaesthetic).

What are my options for replacing missing teeth?

If you are missing one tooth, we would replace this by placing one implant and a screw retained crown. We will usually make you a temporary crown in the first instance to check your satisfaction with the appearance.

We usually need approximately two implants to replace three teeth. If you are missing **all** of your teeth, we can provide you with a fixed bridge on 5 (lower jaw) or 8 (upper jaw) implants. This is secured to the implants using screws, and you will not be able to remove this yourself. As an alternative to a bridge, we can provide you with an overdenture retained on 2-4 implants. These are standard dentures which are held on the implants using either a bar or ball type attachments. You can remove these for cleaning yourself, and some patients like to be able to do this.

How long does the treatment take?

Treatment is usually done in three phases: 1) planning; 2) surgery; 3) making the final prosthesis.

During the **planning** phase, we spend time working out the appearance that suits you best. You will have a lot of input into this. Sometimes, your existing teeth or denture give us a useful guide and we base the appearance of the implant retained prosthesis on this. Occasionally, a patient is dissatisfied with the appearance of their existing prosthesis, and we may have to make a temporary prosthesis to help work out an acceptable appearance. If you have very little bone, we would plan to do a bone grafting procedure at this stage, and we leave bone grafts to heal for six months before doing the surgery to place implants.

The **surgical** phase involves placing the implants, and leaving them heal for approximately two months before using them. In some cases (where your bone is a little “soft”), we cover the implants with your gum and leave them “buried” for 4-6 months. You can wear your denture while this healing is taking place. We will need to do a minor surgical procedure to uncover the implants and then begin the third phase of treatment.

When making the **final prosthesis**, we take a series of impressions and a record of your bite. We make a temporary prosthesis first, and this allows us to evaluate your satisfaction with appearance, comfort, speech and biting. It also allows some time for your gum to heal fully. When everything is satisfactory, we then convert the temporary prosthesis into a definitive version. In summary, treatment can take anything from 3-12 months depending on your individual circumstances.

Will I have to take time of work/school?

In the immediate aftermath of surgery, your mouth will feel a little tender, and there may be some bruising. Most patients take some time off work at this stage, but are generally able to resume work and other activities within 2-3 days.

Is my age important?

There is no upper age limit for treatment – as long as you have good general health, implants can be provided for you. Surgery is contraindicated in certain medical conditions such as poorly controlled diabetes mellitus and major bleeding disorders. We do not recommend implants for patients who have not completed growth, and the general rule of thumb is that we wait until females are 16 years of age and males are 18 years of age.

Are implants for life?

Unfortunately, **no**. Implants are a means of securing a prosthesis into your jawbone, and are **not** a substitute for teeth. They currently offer the most predictable means of providing replacement for missing teeth, but are still a mechanical device which will, in all likelihood, need to be replaced during your lifetime. At the **present** time, we expect around 90% of implants to last up to 20 years. That means that some will fail sooner than this. Occasionally, a prosthesis can loosen, or a piece of material can chip or break off the prosthesis without affecting the implant. In most cases, the prosthesis can be re-tightened, or broken bits easily repaired. It is important to realise that cigarette smoking increases the risk of treatment failure, and we recommend stopping smoking if at all possible.

Treatment Costs:

A full range of treatment costs is available on the Dental Hospital price list. The cost of your treatment will be discussed with you in advance, and you will be asked to sign an agreed cost plan before treatment begins. The prostheses come with a 3 year warranty.

Is there ongoing maintenance?

Yes. You will be shown how to clean your prosthesis, and should attend your dentist for routine check-ups. The Dental Hospital staff will offer you a review appointment for inspection of your implants every 18 months. If you have a problem with your implants, you can attend sooner and you will be given a contact number to arrange this.

This leaflet is available online at <http://www.ucc.ie/en/dentalschool/patients/>