



# TOOTHFULLY SPEAKING!

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## **Dental Implants - the Facts!**

Popular in the media today are dental implants. These implants, which replace people's missing teeth, are certainly not new. In Sweden back in the 60's it was discovered by accident that bone will fuse to titanium, and so the art of joint replacements in orthopedic surgery, and implants in dentistry was born.

Let's dispel some of the myths and misconceptions around implants. They are no longer experimental, but proven as a superior technique to restore a smile and prevent recession of bone in one's jaw. Contrary to popular belief, placing implants is one of the LEAST painful procedures dentistry offers.

Properly managed with regular dental hygiene, implants have a 97% success rate. Rates in diabetics and smokers can be lower. In some instances, 3-5 years down the road if one develops gum disease there can be problems. And because these are usually painless regular implant check-ups are vital.

How about the recovery time? Actually, recovery is so fast following treatment that patients are usually back to work the next day especially if no bone grafting is required.

As for the technique itself, the most important factor is proper preparation of the "socket" vacated by the tooth. Like building a house on solid footings, It is cheaper, easier and healthier to bone graft the socket first if needed, then wait 3-6 months so the implant is in a stable matured bone matrix. Teeth that have been missing for some time need different treatment plans but may still involve grafting.

It is said you only have to take care of the teeth you want to keep, and this is still true with implants. Implants aren't maintenance-free. Gum disease and periodontitis are the main villains, so keeping up with brushing and flossing, regular cleanings and check-ups are a must.

As far as costs are concerned, this varies from case to case, the number of implants, amount of grafting and type of restoration placed. Though "dental tourism" to cheaper countries may be considered, there will likely be compromise on the quality and safety of the implant itself as well as the training and quality standards of the surgeon. These always result in lower success rates, and since most problems with implants occur 3-5 years later one must take this into consideration.

Like any other dental procedure, implants are placed with local freezing. Of course if you want to be sedated, or be asleep, during the procedure this option is also available. It's your choice. Patients may resume normal activities in 24 to 72 hours, and then post-op visits and follow-ups will be scheduled.

What about pain? It seems every patient is pleasantly surprised that pain isn't an issue. Since bone itself has no nerves, usually 2-3 days of ibuprofen or tylenol is all that's needed.

Finally, people sometimes ask why their treatment plan is so long. Optimal treatment lengths will vary from 6 weeks to 12 months depending on the extent of the surgery. Keep in mind both you and your dentist will be at the mercy of your bone's healing capacity. Just like a sprained ankle heals faster than a broken one, soft tissue heals relatively quickly, while bone heals SLOWLY!

Remember to floss only the teeth you want to keep and the same goes for implants!

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