

## Bridge or Implant

Many patients are now given an option when it comes to replacing a missing tooth. The choice is to have a single tooth implant placed or have a bridge placed. Implants are today's best alternative to replace natural teeth and they have become the standard of care for replacing missing teeth. A bridge is the next best alternative and consists of three crowns, two crowns on the teeth adjacent to the missing tooth and a pontic or fake crown attached to the two crowns in the middle. When given the choice which option should you take?

Dental implants are the preferred choice for replacing missing teeth. Ideally placed implants are as close as we can get to natural teeth as possible. Dental implants not only replace the entire missing tooth but they also preserve the supporting bone and do not require that adjacent teeth be prepared for support. Although more expensive initially they are more cost effective in the long run since replacement usually involved only one crown instead of the multiple units involved in a bridge and more importantly they can preserve your bone.

Adequate bone in the jaw is needed to support a dental implant, and the best candidates have healthy gum tissues and also have general good health and do not smoke. Recent advances by implant manufacturers are reducing the time for implant procedures. Treatment for simple cases could take anywhere from four to eight months, based on where the implants are placed and the type of restoration it will receive. In some cases it is possible to place implants and place all the components including a crown immediately.

A bridge is another option which is like having three crowns. The teeth on either side of the missing tooth are prepared for crowns. The laboratory then makes the crowns and fastens a false tooth between the two crowns. The advantages of a bridge are that it is fixed, stable, and feels like your own teeth. In most cases it can be made to look just like you never had a tooth missing. The disadvantage is that you have to cut away enamel from the two teeth besides the one that was extracted and these teeth may otherwise be perfectly sound with nothing wrong.

The average life span of a bridge is around 5 to 7 years. The most common reason for fixed bridge replacement is caries, or decay of the underlying tooth structure. Once either abutment tooth of a bridge develops caries or decay the entire bridge, which is at least three crowns will need to be replaced. Often the abutment tooth will also need more treatment such as a core build up, crown lengthening or root canal therapy.

The success of implant therapy depends on many factors. Oral hygiene plays a very major role in implant success. The manner in which the implant is used can affect the lifespan, for example, is it supporting many teeth or one tooth. If well maintained, an implant may last for more than twenty years. Success rates can be as high as 99%.

Initially, you might feel that dental implants are expensive. However, they represent a more permanent and natural solution than a bridge and because they last longer there will be a cost savings in the future as bridges need to be replaced on average every 5 to 7 years. They also preserve your teeth since they do not sacrifice the quality of your adjacent teeth like a bridge does because neighboring teeth are not altered to support the implant.

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