

Caring for Implants

Implants are used to either replace missing teeth or to make dentures more stable. The actual implant is a metal pin that's embedded in the bone of your jaw, and it should become part of the bone. Once the bone has attached to the implant, a porcelain tooth (a 'crown'), bridge or denture is fastened to the top of the implant. Taking care of implants ensures the supporting bone & gums are kept healthy. This is important to maximising the lifespan of implants.

But it's not the same as cleaning your teeth - your dentist will give you specific advice and recommend special cleaning aids that you must use for your implants. Don't ignore any of this advice - the survival of your implants depends on it.

Implant care occurs in 2 different stages - after the implant is first embedded into the jaw bone, and then after the final crown/bridge/denture is attached to the implant.

1. After your implants are first fitted

When your implants were first placed, your dentist gave you some instructions about how to care for them during the first few days after your surgery.

Cleaning

It will now be several weeks - or perhaps months - until your final crown/bridge or denture is fitted to the implants. It is very important to take good care of the gum over & around the implants during this time. Follow your dentist's cleaning instructions, and use any special cleaning tools your dentist has recommended.

Watch for Problems

It's very important to watch for signs of swelling, bleeding or pain around your new implants. If you have temporary crowns or bridges fitted over your implants, you should also look out for any signs that these are becoming loose or damaged in any way, or if they don't feel correct when you bite. Contact your dentist immediately if you notice any of these things (even if they're minor - we don't mind dealing with 'false alarms').

2. After your crown/bridge/denture is fitted - Long Term Implant care

Eventually, your dentist will fit the final crown, bridge or denture onto your implants. These should last many years, and it's up to you to care for them correctly every day.

Keep things Clean

You should floss and brush around your implants daily, along with your other teeth. This will help prevent gum disease, which can cause loosening (and possible loss) of implants. Your dentist will recommend special floss or other cleaning tools for use around implants. These are specially designed to prevent scratching of the implant metal where it sits outside the gum.

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Avoid Breakage

If your implant has a tooth-coloured crown or bridge attached to it, you need to treat it the same as tooth enamel. The outer coating (porcelain) of your crown/bridge is tough, but it can break if it's put under too much stress. Which means using it sensibly - don't use it to crack hard nuts, chew on paper clips, strip meat from bones, crush ice...

Anything you chew which could damage natural teeth, could also damage your porcelain. This may be impossible to repair, meaning you'll need a new crown or bridge. At worst (although rare), you could also damage the implant under your crown, possibly requiring surgery to remove the implant.

Get regular Dental Check-Ups

Like natural teeth, implants (and the bone & gums around them) should be checked regularly by your dentist to ensure they are performing properly. A regular dental check-up every 6 months is all you need for this.

Bridges

Rather than a single crown, your dentist may have placed a bridge on 2 or more implants. A bridge is used to replace missing teeth. It consists of at least 2 crowns, joined together by one or more porcelain 'false' teeth.

Caring for a bridge is similar to crown care. In general, you need to be more thorough with flossing around your bridge - you must floss carefully under the bridge's false teeth (where they touch the gum) to clean away any build up of plaque or trapped food that could cause gum problems around the implants.

Dentures

An implant-supported denture is similar to a bridge - several teeth are attached to 2 or more implants. Like a bridge, you need to clean under the denture, as well as around the tops of the supporting implants. You should clean your denture & implants at least 2 times each day (even better, after every meal).

If your denture is designed to click in and out of your mouth (a removable denture), then you should always remove the denture to clean it (on all surfaces). Your dentist may have recommended a special cleaning brush or liquid for the denture.

While the denture is removed, you also have to clean the gums and the exposed tops of your implants. Do this gently, using the brush or other tools your dentist has recommended for this job. Rinsing your mouth with warm salty water is a great thing to do before you clip your denture back onto the implants.

If your denture is permanently fixed to the implants, then you clean it like a bridge, using any special cleaning tools your dentist has recommended.

Watch for Problems

Again, you should watch for problems like pain, swelling or bleeding around your implants, as well as loosening or breakage of the crown/bridge or denture that's attached to them. Contact your dentist immediately if you notice anything like this, or are concerned about your implants in any way.

Implants are supposed to last a very long time. Follow your dentist's instructions about caring for your implants, and you should achieve that.