

# Replacing Missing Teeth - *Implants*

## by Scott F. Kenward, DMD

An important step in maintaining a healthy smile is to replace missing teeth. When teeth are missing, the remaining ones can change position, drifting into the surrounding space. Teeth that are out of position can damage soft tissues in the mouth, as well as cause chipping, fracturing and accelerated wear of the remaining teeth.

The change in bite that occurs when teeth are missing or have shifted position is often the cause of Temporomandibular Joint (TMJ) disorder. Chewing can become difficult or even painful. Clenching, grinding and headaches are common symptoms.

The loss of front teeth can severely affect a person's ability to speak clearly. Even the shape of one's face can change dramatically with the loss of even one tooth.

Fortunately, advancements in dental science and technology offer us several wonderful options for correcting tooth loss. Dentists can now replace missing teeth with restorations that look and feel like your own natural teeth.

### **Dental Implants**

Dental implants are changing the way people live! With them, people are rediscovering the comfort and confidence to eat, speak, laugh and enjoy life.

Dental implants are designed to provide a foundation for replacement teeth that look, feel, and function like natural teeth. The person who has lost teeth regains the ability to eat virtually anything and can smile with confidence, knowing that teeth appear natural and that facial contours will be preserved. In addition, implants can help preserve facial structure, preventing the bone deterioration which occurs when teeth are missing.

The implants themselves are tiny titanium posts that are placed into the jawbone where teeth are missing. The bone actually grows onto and fuses with the titanium, creating a strong foundation for artificial teeth.

### **Procedure**

For most patients, the placement of dental implants involves two minor surgical procedures. First, the titanium implants are placed within your jawbone. The implants are completely beneath the surface of the gums, gradually bonding with the jawbone for three to six months following surgery. You should be able to wear temporary dentures, if necessary, and eat a moderately soft diet during this time.

After the implants have bonded to the jawbone, the second phase begins. The surgeon will uncover the tops of the implants and attach small healing collars to them, at gum surface level. After a few days, special impressions will be taken so that your dentist will be able to start making your new teeth.

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The healing collars will then be replaced with posts or attachments, connected to the implants. The teeth replacements are then fitted to these posts or attachments. The entire procedure usually takes six to eight months. Most patients do not experience any disruption in their daily life.

If, like many others, you feel implant dentistry is the choice for you, we ask our patients to undergo a dental/radiographic examination and health history. During these consultation visits, your specific needs and considerations will be addressed by your dentist, or by an Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeon referred by the practice. Your dental team will be happy to address any questions and concerns that you may have and will work with you very closely to help make your procedure a success.

*Dr. Kenward is a dentist at 12651 South Dixie Highway in Pinecrest. His focus is on cosmetic and preventive dentistry. For more information call 305-255-7722.*