

Have you lost a tooth? Dental Implants can be the answer

By Dr. Melanie Rabeni

Losing a tooth can happen for a variety of reasons and may have a devastating effect on how a person feels about their smile and themselves. A missing tooth can ruin a beautiful smile and may even cause the patient to smile less as a result. It can also make eating difficult and may loosen surrounding teeth that rely on it for support. For all of these reasons, it's important to replace a missing tooth as quickly as possible to prevent further damage.

While bridges were typically used to replace a missing tooth, they have their limitations and can only help in certain situations. The installation of these dental bridges also requires significant modifications to be made to the healthy teeth surrounding the missing tooth. These adjacent teeth will need to be reduced in size to allow them to accommodate the attachment of the bridge for the missing tooth. Even though this may seem like a reasonable tradeoff initially, it can weaken these border teeth and cause bigger problems over time.

A dental implant is another popular option with patients that provides a permanent fix for a missing tooth. Unlike a bridge, the dental implant can be installed anywhere in the mouth without involving other teeth in the process. This enables you to repair the tooth that has been lost with a permanent replacement that doesn't rely on your other teeth for support. This solution will look and feel like the original tooth and should give you a lifetime of use if you have regular checkups and cleanings.

The dental implant consists of two separate pieces that can mimic the original tooth perfectly. Together these two pieces will provide all the same functions as the original tooth and will allow you to enjoy a normal diet. Over time you might actually forget you had the implant installed. Unlike other solutions, the dental implant is anchored to your jawbone for support, just like the original tooth.

The first thing your dentist will do before considering a dental implant for your missing tooth is a complete dental checkup and x-rays of your mouth. These x-rays will allow the dentist to see how much jawbone you have in the area of the missing tooth. Since this implant will be anchored to the actual jawbone, there needs to be sufficient bone mass to support the tooth. If the bone is thinner as it is on some older patients, the cosmetic dentist can build up this jawbone through bone grafts before starting the implant treatment. This additional bone material will help to better anchor the dental implant and provide all the support it requires.

The procedure involves the installation of a small post in the patient's jawbone as a first step. This post is installed into a hole drilled into the jawbone and left to

fuse with the bone itself. The process may take several months to occur and once this post becomes part of the jawbone it will never shift in place. The last step involves securing a crown to the top of the shaft that acts just like the original tooth. This crown is made from a durable material that can match your other teeth perfectly and provide decades of trouble-free use.

Dr. Melanie Rabeni owns Rabeni Dental in Plymouth, MA. For the latest information on how to create a beautiful smile through cosmetic dentistry, visit www.rabenedental.com.

This article may be freely reprinted or distributed in its entirety in any e-zine, newsletter, blog, or website. The author's name, bio and website links must remain intact and be included with every reproduction.