

HOW-TO

CHOOSE A DENTAL IMPLANT SPECIALIST

If you have missing or damaged teeth, you are certainly not alone. According to the National Institute of Health, at least 113 million Americans are missing one or more teeth. By age 50, the average American has lost 12 teeth. With society's growing obsession with the "perfect smile," most people would like to remedy the situation but don't know where to turn.

There are basically three alternatives for individuals with missing or damaged teeth that need to be replaced:

- A Bridge attaches artificial teeth to adjacent natural teeth, called abutment teeth. Bridges can be applied either permanently (fixed bridges), or they can be removable.

- Full or Partial Dentures are used when there are a number of teeth missing in the same area of the mouth. In some cases, it is recommended that additional teeth be removed to accommodate the use of dentures.

- Dental Implants are widely considered to be the most popular alternative for missing teeth. An implant is a surgically-implanted tooth that is rooted to the jawbone with a surgical screw.

ADVANTAGES OF DENTAL IMPLANTS

Dental implants offer many advantages over bridges and dentures, the most important of which is that implants are more natural looking. No one will ever know that you have a replacement tooth. Also, since dental implants integrate into the structure of your bone, they prevent the bone loss and gum recession that often accompany bridgework and dentures, and help protect adjacent natural teeth.

The success rate of dental implants is also highly predictable. They are considered the standard of care for tooth replacement.

CHOOSING A DENTAL IMPLANT SPECIALIST

Like many other medical specialties, there is very specific training involved in becoming a dental implant specialist. Since most tooth loss is the result of periodontal disease, periodontists, who are considered the "oral plastic surgeon," are the industry experts in the placement of dental implants.

But even the most experienced periodontist will tell you that the dental implant process is best handled with a team approach: your general or cosmetic dentist working in concert with the periodontist. "The vast majority of cases that we handle are referrals from general or cosmetic dentists in the area," explains Robert A. Levine, DDS, head of the Pennsylvania Center for Dental Implants and Periodontics and Chairman Emeritus of the Division of Periodontics at Albert Einstein Medical Center. "The patient's current dentist has an in-depth understanding of his or her oral health history and will be continuing care after the dental implant has been put in place. In order to ensure a seamless experience for the patient, the general dentist and the implant specialist must work as a team and be on the same page at all times."

It is also important to be sure you are dealing with a board-certified periodontist, i.e., a Diplomate of the American Board of Periodontics. Periodontists (as well as some prosthodontists) typically train for three years after dental school learning specific areas of surgery which also include dental implant placement. Beware of general dentists who claim to do dental implant surgery as part of their practice. Often their training comes from weekend continuing education courses and is not nearly as in depth as a fully trained and licensed periodontist.

CONSIDER THE LATEST TECHNOLOGIES

The dental implant process is notorious for being long and laborious, often involving dozens of visits to the specialist over a six- to 12-month period. However, an exciting new alternative to the traditional implant process has been introduced in recent years, offering a significantly shorter treatment time and an impressive track record of success for patients.

The process is known as "immediate loading" and it allows the patient to literally have a new tooth or new set of teeth in less than 24 to 48 hours. Dr. Levine is one of only a handful of periodontists nationwide who have been treating patients with the immediate loading process

for more than 10 years. Known as "SameDay Smile(r)" in Dr. Levine's practice, the procedure has been featured on ABC-TV's "Extreme Makeover" and is considered one of the most significant breakthroughs in the periodontal field in decades.

In the traditional implant process, an implant anchor is placed in the patient's mouth, in essence becoming the new "root" for the replacement tooth. Then there is a waiting period ranging from 3 to 12 months to ensure it has properly bonded to the jawbone. During that time, the patient has to deal with having an unsightly gap in their teeth. With the new "SameDay Smile(r)" technique, a "bone-friendly" titanium anchor is used, which immediately gives the replacement tooth a solid and lasting foundation. A temporary replacement is immediately adhered to the anchor and the patient leaves the same day with a complete set of teeth. Then within three months, the final replacement restoration commences. The patient never experiences unsightly gaps, there is no waiting to have a complete set of teeth and the number of office visits is dramatically reduced. Even more important, there is a considerable reduction in pain, complications and discomfort for the patient.

To Dr. Levine, a recognized expert on periodontics and implantology, immediate loading represents the future of his profession. "The advantages of this process are so obvious to patients that many people who have held off on dental implants in the past are now moving forward as quickly as they can," says Dr. Levine.

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

The Pennsylvania Center for Dental Implants and Periodontics is located in the Einstein Center One Building on Bustleton Road in Northeast Philadelphia. If you would like to learn more about SameDay Smile(r), the immediate loading process, call the Center at 215-677-8686 or visit them on the Web at www.paden-talimplants.com. You may also visit www.MDTVselectperio.org, to see a national TV program called, "Periodontist: Dental Implants and Oral Plastic Surgery," featuring Dr. Levine (click on "Locate a Dentist," and then on Dr. Levine's name under Pennsylvania to view this program.)