

Options for replacement of a missing tooth



You have been given this sheet because you are contemplating the options you have for replacing a missing tooth.

Modern dentistry offers several options for tooth replacement all of which have advantages and disadvantages as well as certain clinical situations in which they are more appropriate. The following information should help you to understand your options and to be able to give informed consent should you decide to proceed with treatment.

The information presented here is of a general nature. Your dentist will discuss your specific circumstances with you. It is expected you will ask questions if there is anything you don't understand or if there is anything you are concerned about.

Implants

An Implant is a titanium screw which is placed into the bone to replace the missing root of a tooth. Titanium is unique in the fact that it is bio-compatible and is usually accepted by the body and integrated into the bone.

Once integration has occurred (usually 6-12 weeks) Implants can be used to support crowns, bridges or dentures.

Advantages

- The presence of the implant in the bone reduces future bone loss in that area
- The implant is 'stand alone' i.e. doesn't involve the preparation of adjacent teeth.
- Easier to maintain oral hygiene than some other options.
- Implants have been shown in the scientific literature to have very high survival / success rates.

Disadvantages

- Does require a surgical procedure to place the Implant. If insufficient bone is present in the desired site then another prior surgical procedure may be needed for bone augmentation.
- Time delay between implant placement and restoration with crown (though immediate temporary crowns can sometimes be placed)
- Expense. Implants are usually the most expensive option. Variations occur depending on site and difficulty and what they are being restored with. However, the suggested long-term survivability of Implants may make them a more cost-effective option over time.

Fixed Porcelain Bridges

A bridge to replace a missing tooth involves preparing the teeth either side of the gap as if for a crown (i.e. drilling about 1-2mm of tooth structure or filling material away on all aspects of the tooth).

However, instead of making two separate crowns the technician makes a 3 unit bridge in which a porcelain tooth to replace the missing tooth is supported by the teeth either side. This bridge is cemented in as one unit.

The main disadvantage with bridges is the need to prepare the teeth either side of the gap. It is not preferred in otherwise healthy or unrestored teeth as it is not without risks to the tooth. It is indicated more when the teeth either side are already heavily filled or root-filled and may benefit functionally or aesthetically from crowning themselves.

Survival rates of bridges vary from 7–20+ years. The literature suggests a 10 year survival rate of 90%. Factors which affect survival include the site of the bridge; the patient's level of oral hygiene maintenance; the original condition of the supporting teeth; grinding habits; material selection, to name a few.

Adhesive Bridges (usually front teeth only)

This is where a replacement porcelain tooth is cemented to the adjacent natural tooth by means of a metal 'wing' attached to the replacement tooth. This wing is cemented to the back of the adjacent tooth.

This has the advantage of minimal preparation to the adjacent tooth and a cheaper cost, but should be seen only as an option in the front of the mouth. The literature does suggest comparable 10 year survival rates to fixed bridges for well selected cases.

Partial dentures

These are a cost effective option for replacing a lot of missing teeth but usually seen only as a temporary option for replacing single missing teeth.

Please refer to the other information sheets we have relating to Bridgework and Implant retained crowns and use this information to discuss your specific clinical situation with the dentist in order make the choice most appropriate for yourself.

