

## Q & A: Dental Implants

I do a lot of talking about teeth. Whether at work or at a dinner party, the subject of teeth seems to be a prevalent factor in my life. We even spend quite a bit of time “off the clock” talking about dentistry at home. Luckily, it’s a subject that I still enjoy because there’s always more to learn and stay abreast of. I suppose the day I get tired of talking (and for that matter, writing) about teeth should be the day I retire. Until then...

Whether at the office or by email from readers, I tend to field lot of questions about dentistry. They are all great fodder for my weekly musings, so I’d like to share some of the more common questions that we get about different aspects of dentistry. This week we’ll discuss dental implants. Thanks in advance for reading.

*What are those dental posts you keep writing about in the paper?* To be brief, dental implants are titanium replacements for the roots of lost teeth. Usually, they look like short, fat, sterile, titanium screws. They can be used in a variety of ways: to replace teeth, to hold dentures or partials in place, or to help move teeth (orthodontics), among other things.

*Wow, that must really hurt.* Actually, other than the initial injection of anesthetic, dental implant placement is almost always pain free. This is because the bone that the implants are placed into is free of nerve fibers that sense pain. If our patients ever have any post operative pain, it’s usually from us having to surgically manipulate the gums around the implant site. Putting an implant in is a lot less painful than when the tooth had to come out in the first place. Implants rarely get “toothaches.”

*Are implants safe?* Titanium has been implanted into our bodies for years with very few proven negative effects. Occasionally, an implant can get infected. This is a rare occurrence and can usually be treated with antibiotics. Another positive about implants is that they help your body keep the bone where your teeth have been lost.

*Why are implants so expensive?* The cost of an implant to replace a single tooth is generally a little more than a bridge would be to replace that same tooth. Implants do cost more from start to finish because there are generally more lab fees, more parts to purchase, and more time and training involved in using them. I recently saw a study demonstrating that if you are planning on living more than seven years, the long term cost of an implant to replace one tooth would beat the long term cost of a bridge for replacing that same tooth.

*What are “mini” implants?* The term “mini” refers to the diameter of the implant. Narrower implants are generally easier to place and can be used in areas where there is less bone to hold the implants in. They are also sometimes less expensive. The most common use for these smaller diameter implants is to hold in a loose denture or partial.

These are just a few questions I’ve answered lately. If you have any more, please keep sending them to [ParrishDental@aol.com](mailto:ParrishDental@aol.com) and I’ll do my best to clear things up. Until next time, keep smiling.