

Bionic Teeth

Implants to replace missing teeth are catching on quickly. Most of the patients I see seem to have some understanding of the use of implants. It is probably the most important advancement in dentistry in the last twenty years, and still improving.

The most remarkable improvements are in the ease of placement and the predictability. Patients cautiously nod when I tell them that placing an implant is usually easier than removing a tooth—both from the dentist and patient's perspective. But almost every time they report that they had very little pain afterwards, often needing no pain medication.

As the word spreads, this will become an even more popular procedure. I have had several patients ask to have their fixed bridges replaced with implants, and some asking to forego the traditional root canal and crown and just remove the tooth and place an implant (and many well-respected dentists are proposing that as well). Patients with dentures are having them done more frequently as the procedure becomes more affordable.

I won't get into the technical aspects of implants in this column because there is plenty of information about the procedures on the internet. Basically, a small titanium cylinder is placed into the area and allowed to fuse with the bone over several months (in some instances there is no need to wait). The restoration of an implant after it fuses with the bone is even less complicated than traditional crowns—and it involves NO DRILLING! .

If you are not familiar with implants, you should learn more about them. Your general dentist can explain all of the pros and cons for your individual situation. Most dentists who do surgery are capable of placing implants, but it requires a large investment in equipment, supplies, and education. If your dentist does not place implants, they will be able to refer you to someone who does.

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