

Dental implants

The aim of this information sheet is to help answer some of the questions you may have about having a dental implant. It explains the benefits, risks and alternatives of the procedure as well as what you can expect when you come to hospital. If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to the dentist or dental nurse caring for you.

What are dental implants?

They are artificial replacements for your tooth roots that are placed within the bone of your jaw to help support dentures, crowns (caps) or bridges. Implants should provide you with a long-lasting tooth replacement if they are cared for in the same way that teeth should be cared for.

What happens during the placement of a dental implant?

Treatment is normally divided into two or three stages, each of which may involve several visits to your dentist.

Pre-operative assessment

Before implants can be placed, x-rays and impressions of your mouth will be needed. These allow us to plan the best way to treat you. This will involve several visits to the hospital.

Stage one treatment

The next stage of your treatment is to insert the implants. Your dentist will inform you if minor grafting is required at the same time. This is normally done under local anaesthetic (an injection which makes the area where we are working numb) by lifting the gum away from the underlying bone, then gently and carefully drilling into the jaw bone. The implant is inserted into the bone, the gum is replaced and held together with stitches. The stitches are removed about a week later.

Following insertion, some types of implant will stick out through the gum, while other types will be buried underneath the gum. The implants will usually be left for at least three months before they are used to support replacement teeth. Implants buried under the gum will require a second small surgical procedure to expose them before they can be used.

Restorative treatment

You will need a number of appointments to make your crowns, bridges or denture. This will include taking impressions and checking the fit of the parts used to make your replacement teeth. In total, treatment could extend over six to twelve months.

Your implant treatment will be carried out by qualified dentists who are consultants, specialists or postgraduate students. While consultants will be responsible for your care, you may be treated by more than one dentist.

What are the benefits – why should I have dental implants?

Dental implants can be very useful where we would otherwise have to crown healthy teeth or where a denture or bridge would be difficult or sometimes impossible because there are no suitable teeth or gums for support.

What are the risks?

There is a small risk that the implants may not fuse properly with the bone in your mouth and so cannot be used. The risk is higher in certain individuals, particularly those who smoke, and you will be advised if we think the risk of failure is higher than normal in your case.

Implant placement involves surgery in your mouth and so will be followed by some soreness, swelling, bleeding or bruising. Any discomfort is usually controlled with simple painkillers and should only last a few days to a week

It is possible for parts of your implants to loosen or wear out with time. This can lead to failure of the implant, or the restoration on the implant, if not treated quickly. You will be responsible for the long-term care of your implants, by seeking care at your own dentist at your own cost.

Some patients who require implants do not have sufficient bone. In these circumstances it may be necessary to carry out a bone graft. This involves more surgery and associated swelling, bruising and pain. The risks of this procedure will be explained to you separately. With a bone graft, treatment may take four to six months longer (see our information sheets **Minor bone grafting**, for more information).

Are there any other alternatives?

The available treatment options will vary a lot from person to person, and so will be discussed with you on an individual basis. These may include no treatment, preparing other teeth for crowns or bridges or an alternative design of denture (if possible).

How can I prepare for a dental implant?

Please make sure you have told us about any problems with your health and about any tablets or medicines you are taking. Some medical conditions change the advice and information we need to give you.

If you are a smoker we strongly advise you to quit and remain a non-smoker in the long term. This will significantly reduce the risk of some implant complications. For help giving up smoking, please speak to your nurse, or call the Trust stop smoking service (**t: 020 7188 0995**), or call the NHS Smoking Helpline (**t: 0800 169 0 169**)

Asking for your consent

We want to involve you in decisions about your care and treatment. If you decide to go ahead, you will be asked to sign a consent form. This states that you agree to have the treatment and you understand what it involves. If you would like more information about our consent process, please speak to a member of staff caring for you.

We will inform you about your planned treatment in detail before we start. However, there are times during treatment when we have to change the planned treatment. If this is necessary we will make sure that you are told and give you the choice whether to proceed with the other treatment. If you are having sedation or a general anaesthetic for your treatment, we will discuss all possible alternative treatments with you in advance.

Will I feel any pain?

The level of discomfort is variable and mostly requires painkillers, such as paracetamol or ibuprofen, which are available from your local pharmacy. It is better to take these before the local anaesthesia wears off, at the interval and maximum dose prescribed on the packet, for the first 48 hours.

What happens after the procedure?

If you have had the procedure under local anaesthesia you will be able to leave hospital as soon as the procedure has been completed. You should be able to eat normally after the surgery but a soft diet may be advised by your surgeon. You should avoid alcohol for 24 hours. Implant patients are advised to quit smoking before starting treatment and to remain a non-smoker in the long-term.

What do I need to do after I go home?

You should be able to return to work within a day of your treatment. Occasionally you may not be able to wear your dentures for up to two weeks after the surgery (the doctor or nurse treating you will let you know if this is the case). For the first week after your implant surgery it is not advisable to brush the area, therefore a mouthwash containing chlorhexidine (for example, Corsodyl) is recommended to keep the area free of plaque. You will be given more personalised advice following your treatment about looking after your implants.

Will I have a follow-up appointment?

Any dental restorations or dentures based on implants will need regular follow up and maintenance. Your next appointment will either be given to you before you leave hospital or sent to you in the post. We will expect you to be willing to attend for such care, and for regular checks of the implants themselves.

Contact us

If you have any problems please contact the dental implant department, **t:** 020 7188 1816, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, or **e:** dentalimplants@gstt.nhs.uk

For emergencies outside these hours go to your nearest Emergency Department (A&E).

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

t: 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

t: 020 7188 8801 (PALS) **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints) **e:** complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

Language and Accessible Support Services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch:

t: 020 7188 8815 **e:** languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

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