



Dental Implants: What You Need To Know

Specialist Care by Dr Jesslyn Praganta - Otago Oral Surgery & Implant Centre

What Are Dental Implants?

A dental implant is a small titanium post that is carefully and precisely placed into your jawbone, acting as a replacement for the root of a missing tooth. Over time, the implant fuses with the bone in a process called osseointegration, creating a strong and stable foundation for a custom-made crown/bridge/denture that looks and functions just like natural teeth.

Dental implants not only restore your ability to chew and speak comfortably but also help preserve the structure of your dental arch, preventing tilting, over-eruption or drifting of adjacent teeth that can occur when teeth are missing. Unlike traditional bridges, dental implants do not require grinding down adjacent teeth, making them a healthier choice for tooth replacement.

If you struggle with loose dentures, implants are also excellent at improving the retention and stability of your dentures. This is often a more cost-effective option compared to full-arch fixed implant bridge.

For some patients, additional procedures such as bone grafting, soft tissue grafting, or a sinus lift may be needed to prepare the site for implant placement. These procedures are performed if we need to increase the bone and gums volume, ensuring the best possible results for your implant treatment.

Implant Procedure At Otago Oral Surgery & Implant Centre

- ◆ **Initial consultation:** A comprehensive assessment of your oral health and potential implant site(s), including 2D x-rays, 3D CBCT scan, and intraoral scan. A personalised treatment plan will be formulated based on this.
- ◆ **Implant placement surgery:** The titanium post is surgically placed into the jawbone. This is usually under local anaesthesia but IV sedation option is available if required. Should bone grafting or sinus lift be required, this will be a separate surgery prior to implant placement.
- ◆ **Healing period:** Over the next 3-6 months, the implant fuses (“osseointegrates”) with the jawbone.
- ◆ **Abutment placement:** A small connector is attached to the implant to support the final restoration.
- ◆ **Osseointegration check:** The healing of the dental implant will be assessed to ensure it is ready for a custom-made restoration to be attached to it.

Implant-Associated Procedures

Bone Grafting:

Bone grafting is often necessary for patients who have experienced bone loss in their jaw due to missing teeth, gum disease, infection or trauma. When a tooth is lost, the surrounding bone begins to shrink over time. Without enough bone to support a dental implant, a grafting procedure may be recommended to rebuild the area. This involves placing bone graft material in the deficient area, encouraging new bone growth over several months to provide a stable base for the implant. Although the idea of bone grafting may seem daunting, it is a routine and safe procedure that significantly improves the chances of a successful implant.

There are various types of commercial bone graft materials available, including autografts (bone taken from other parts of the mouth), allografts (donor bone), xenografts (bone derived from animal sources), and synthetic bone substitutes. Additionally, collagen membranes are often used in conjunction with bone grafts to help guide bone regeneration and protect the surgical site to improve healing. If you have specific cultural or religious preferences regarding the use of biomaterials, we encourage you to discuss them with Dr Praganta as she will work with you to ensure the best treatment plan that aligns with your needs and values.

Soft Tissue Grafting:

In some cases, the gums around a missing tooth may recede or become thin, which can affect both the function and aesthetics of an implant. Soft tissue grafting is used to reinforce or rebuild the gum tissue, ensuring the implant looks natural and blends seamlessly with your surrounding teeth. This procedure can also help protect the implant and surrounding teeth from further recession. Commonly, soft tissue grafts are taken from the roof of the mouth, but modern techniques have also allowed for the use of donor tissues, making the process more comfortable for patients.

Sinus Lift Surgery:

For patients needing implants in the upper jaw, particularly in the back molar region, a sinus lift may be required. When teeth in this area are lost, the sinuses can expand into the space where bone should be, leaving insufficient support for an implant. A sinus lift is a gentle procedure that carefully raises the sinus membrane and places bone graft material beneath it, creating the necessary bone height for a secure implant. The healing process typically takes several months before the implant can be placed, but this step is crucial to ensuring a long-lasting and successful restoration.

Expected Recovery & Outcome

- ◆ Mild swelling and discomfort for a few days, which can be managed with prescribed medication.
- ◆ A soft diet is recommended for the first few weeks to aid healing.
- ◆ Regular follow-ups ensure implant stability and monitor healing progress.
- ◆ Proper oral hygiene home care, routine dental check-up, and hygiene visits are key in maintaining dental implants' health and longevity.
- ◆ A fully restored smile that looks and functions like natural teeth

Your Comfort: Sedation Options

Dr Praganta will help you choose the best option based on your needs and medical history. We prioritise your **comfort and peace of mind** with tailored sedation options:

- ◆ **Local anaesthesia:** Numbs the area while you remain awake
- ◆ **IV sedation:** Induces deep relaxation with minimal memory of the procedure

At Otago Oral Surgery & Implant Centre we understand that any surgical procedure can feel overwhelming, and we are here to guide you every step of the way. Dr Jesslyn Praganta and our caring team are committed to providing expert, compassionate care in a comfortable environment. If you're considering dental implants or have questions about these procedures, we invite you to schedule a consultation to explore the best treatment options for you.

Your smile is in good hands!