DENTAL IMPLANTS

If you are missing one or more teeth or are bothered by dentures or partials that slip, dental implants may be right for you! Besides the obvious cosmetic inconvenience of missing teeth, additional oral and general health problems may result when teeth are not replaced. Missing teeth can result in "tooth extrusion" or movement of another tooth into the empty space. Shifting or movement of adjacent teeth that occurs when tooth roots are not present may require additional orthodontic correction or treatment. Because of the misalignment that occurs due to shifting of teeth, the teeth may be more susceptible to decay and gum disease, possibly leading to additional tooth loss. Missing teeth can decrease chewing ability and may also affect speech.

If your upper or lower jaw is "edentulous" (all the teeth in that jaw are missing), "bone resorption" will occur over time in that jaw. The body "resorbs" the jawbone that used to surround the roots, causing the bone to "shrink". This frequently causes problems for denture wearers because as the jawbone shrinks, dentures can become loose. When dental implants are placed, bone loss is often reduced or eliminated.

What is a Dental Implant?

Natural teeth are stable biting and chewing surfaces because the tooth roots are firmly anchored and supported by the surrounding jawbone. Dental implants function much the same way. Implants are tooth root substitutes that look, feel and function much like the roots of natural teeth. Dental implants can replace a single missing tooth or several missing teeth.

Studies have shown dental implants to have a high rate of success, and can last for many years when cared for properly. The implant itself is a tiny metal cylinder that is surgically inserted in the jawbone. The material used for the dental implant is biocompatible, meaning it is well accepted by the body. Over time, the jawbone surrounding the implant grows into the implant surfaces and attaches to the implant, anchoring it firmly in place. This process of bone attachment is known as "osseointegration".

A single tooth implant involves three separate parts: the implant root, the post that supports the artificial tooth (abutment) and the prosthetic tooth (crown or cap). The artificial tooth may be cemented onto the post or held in place with a tiny screw.

Dental implants can be used in people of all ages. However, you must be evaluated by your surgeon and restorative dentist to determine if you are a good candidate. Sometimes bone grafting is necessary prior to implant placement. With dental implants, you will rediscover the comfort and confidence to eat, speak, laugh and smile!