



BRILLIANCE  
BY BROUTIN

# My Smile Experience

---

Learn About The Journey of  
Dental Implants

**Written By An Actual Patient**

# My Smile Experience

When it comes to having “bad teeth”, everyone’s story is unique. I didn’t go to the dentist very often growing up, except for the occasional teeth cleaning and checkup appointment. By the time I was in college, I was too busy to come back home to see my old dentist, so I just stopped going.

Once I got out on my own and landed a job with dental benefits, I started seeing my dentist again. At least for a while. There were some old fillings that he wanted to keep an eye on, but before I knew it, I had moved, changed jobs, and lost my dental coverage. I never went back.

## **Fast Forward 30 Years.**

Looking back, I should have known better. My parents both had bad teeth and I specifically remember my grandparents saying that they were both in dentures by their 40s. But my teeth never really bothered me, so I didn’t give them much thought.

One day, everything changed. I bit down on something the wrong way and one of my teeth split in half. And on top of that, I had already been struggling with a toothache on that side of my mouth. So, I made a dental appointment and chose to get both teeth (one abscessed, the other fractured) extracted ASAP because of how severe the pain and infection was. While I was there, I also learned that I had some serious periodontal disease throughout the rest of my mouth.

Long story short, I wound up getting several more teeth removed because of how aggressive the gum disease was. I knew that this was going to be a turning point for my oral health, because I couldn’t stand to think of how tooth loss was already affecting my everyday life. And at this point, I was already going to be faced with the embarrassment of missing teeth unless I did something quickly. I wouldn’t be able to even smile in front of the mirror until I did something about it.

# The Search for the Best Tooth Replacement

As I was weighing the pros and cons of different types of tooth replacement treatments, I analyzed just about everything you can think of. So much so, that I made an Excel spreadsheet of the time commitment, costs involved, what my new insurance plan would cover, and the average life expectancy of each restoration.

For most people, replacing missing teeth boils down to the following choices:

- Dentures
- Partial dentures
- Dental bridges
- Dental implants

...or not replacing your teeth at all. But for me, that wasn't an option.

## Why I Chose Dental Implants

The options for replacing my missing teeth were challenging to narrow down. But for me, dental implants offered the best opportunity to have a smile that looked and felt like the real thing.

When I learned that implants have the highest success rate of any treatment and that I could expect my new "teeth" to last for the rest of my life, I knew that the investment was one that would ultimately pay off. I wouldn't have to worry about getting them updated or changed out like dentures or worrying about supporting teeth gradually wearing down like they do with conventional bridges.

## Why I Wrote This Book

When I was thinking about getting dental implants, the entire process seemed overwhelming. Everywhere you turned, there were commercials or

websites promising the best tooth replacement. But even the prices that were advertised were all over the board.

What I really wanted was to hear first-hand from someone who had been in my shoes and done all of the right research. From the embarrassment of missing teeth to trying to figure out how to afford dental implants, I wanted to hear the whole story — not just the 15-second highlight after the entire process was over.

**As you read through this booklet, I'll cover the basics of:**

- What are dental implants?
- Types of implants available
- Paying for implant treatment
- The preparation and treatment process
- Things to keep in mind if you're traveling from out of town
- Basic implant FAQs

# What is a Dental Implant?

The easiest way to describe a dental implant is to call it a prosthetic tooth. Essentially the implant is the “root” portion of your tooth that needs to be replaced. On top of the implant (root) is a special attachment that your dentist uses to anchor a “tooth” like a crown or bridge. More often than not, dentists will use implants in pairs or sets to anchor multi-tooth bridges or hybrid dentures (like “All-on-4”) instead of installing an implant at every site where a tooth is missing.

Modern implants look and feel like natural teeth. But a few decades ago, they were an invasive procedure that required extensive surgery. Today’s designs set alongside of your other teeth, as if you never lost one in the first place! And since the crown on top of it looks like the same type of treatment you would get for fixing a broken or worn-out tooth, nobody will be able to tell the difference.

Implants are better than treatments like bridges or partials, because you don’t have to grind down healthy teeth or wear anything removable. Instead, the implant stands independently from the other teeth in your mouth. And when you replace a missing tooth, you help to prevent the other teeth from leaning or tilting into the gap (so that your smile stays straight.) Plus, you can get full mouth restoration (where all of your teeth are replaced at one time) using as few as four implants to avoid getting a bulky denture.

Since implants are about the same size as a full adult tooth, most dentists will not install them in teens or children whose mouths are still growing. Generally, the age minimum to get implants is about 18. But here’s a perk: you don’t ever age out!

# Do Dental Implants Suit Everybody?

Even though dentists tend to prefer implants for their patients, not everybody qualifies for the treatment. Part of the screening process will include a thorough review of your medical history — including every medication or supplement that you're taking, even if it's over the counter — and an X-ray of your entire mouth to analyze your bone structure.

Generally speaking, there are some basic criteria for dental implant patients that everyone has to meet.

## Ideal Candidates For Implants

- Single, multiple, or full mouth of missing teeth
- Adults with healthy bone levels and gum tissues
- Commitment to clean and maintain your implants like natural teeth

## When Implants May Be Contraindicated

- You have extensive bone loss
- Underlying health issues or certain medications you're taking
- Under 18 years of age
- Tobacco use

One thing that I learned while I was getting dental implants is that so much technology has changed over the past decade, that people who didn't qualify for implant treatment before may now be considered candidates. For example, today a lot of dentists use 3D scans to plan out where the implant is placed, which broadens the criteria for people who might have been told "You don't have enough bone". So even if a dentist told you years ago that you wouldn't qualify for implants, that might not be true today. Or, you might have a dentist who is able to place extra bone in your jaw to make sure the implant is stable enough.

The key is to find a dentist with enough experience and technology to be able to complete your implant treatment from start to finish. Even if that means driving in from out of town!

# Dental Implant Materials

Implants are made out of hypoallergenic, biocompatible materials like what you would see in surgeries such as a hip replacement or a pin that's used to help repair a broken bone. Once it's installed, your body forms new layers of bone around it and it becomes a permanent part of your anatomy (dentists call this process "osseointegration.")

Even if you have a metal sensitivity — for example, you're someone who breaks out if you wear cheap jewelry — titanium shouldn't be an issue. That being said, you still need to make your dentist aware of it.

The attachment that goes on top of your implant (which serves as a base for the "tooth" on top) is also made out of titanium. But the final restoration like a hybrid denture, crown or bridge will be made out of something more aesthetic, such as porcelain or even acrylic.

There are newer types of implants being developed that are made out of ceramic, so that they're tooth-colored instead of metal. But ceramic implants don't trigger the same bone integration that titanium does, so most dentists only use them if there's a major cosmetic barrier to consider.

# The Dental Implant Success Rate

One of the things you'll hear about dental implants is their extremely high success rate. But what does that mean to you as someone who is considering getting them?

Compared to other types of tooth replacement treatments or everyday dental procedures (including fillings,) implants are said to have the highest percentage of success. That is, there's an extremely low chance of the implant procedure failing or experiencing complications.

Implants are generally said to have about a 98% or higher success rate. So only about 1-2 out of every 100 cases will experience problems. Fortunately, careful screening and good home care keeps implant failure to a minimum.

So, what could jeopardize the success of an implant? Issues like gum disease from not brushing/flossing or if the implant is installed where there isn't enough bone are the most common risk factors.

Working with an experienced implant dentist — and then making sure you clean your implants just like real teeth — can help you enjoy the perks of such a successful tooth replacement treatment. Just be sure to follow your home care instructions!

# Advantages and Disadvantages of Dental Implants

The advantages of implants far outweigh the perks of other types of tooth replacements. For me, once I understood the benefits that implants had to offer, I knew that making the investment in a permanent treatment was exactly what I needed.

## The Perks Of Getting Implants

- Dental implants can last for the rest of your life
- You don't have to wear removable appliances
- Implants are made to look and feel like real teeth
- You can eat whatever you want
- The design supports your facial tissues (to prevent premature aging)
- They're stronger than natural teeth
- You can use implants in pairs to replace multiple teeth at one time
- Non-invasive to your neighboring teeth
- Help preserve healthy bone in your jaws
- Highest success rate (98%) of any dental procedure
- Fairly comfortable procedure (only local anesthetic is needed)
- Options for teeth in a day/same day treatment

## The Not-So-Great Aspects

- Bigger upfront costs (yet they still cost less over time compared to other treatments)
- Sometimes the process is spread out over several months
- More complex than "just getting dentures"
- Not everyone qualifies for implants
- Involves minor oral surgery
- You may need to have existing teeth taken out

# Dental Implant Types

With dental implants, your dentist can create stand-alone independent teeth, or anchor something that replaces multiple teeth at one time (such as a bridge or “All-on-4”.) If you have several teeth in a row that need to be replaced, you probably won’t get an individual implant in each spot.

Depending on what you need, the type of implant treatment that you’ll get will usually be one of the following:

## Single Teeth Implants

For an individual missing tooth that has healthy teeth on either side, your dentist can install a stand-alone implant and then attach a crown on top of it. This prevents you from having to grind down the adjacent teeth to anchor a bridge.

## Dental Bridges

Let’s say you have four teeth in a row that are missing. Instead of wearing a removable partial denture, your dentist can install one implant on either side of the gap in your bite. Then, a multi-tooth bridge can be attached on top of the pair of implants (a traditional bridge usually can’t replace any more than two teeth at a time.)

## Full Mouth Dental Implants

Now, let’s pretend that all of your teeth are missing. Normally, you would probably get a set of dentures. But dentures can feel bulky, affect the taste of your food, and even impact the way that you talk. So instead, your dentist can use as few as four implants placed at specific points throughout your upper or lower jaw to permanently attach a hybrid denture (there’s no “plate” that covers the roof of your mouth, so it’s more like a bridge.) Implants are stronger than natural teeth, so the most you would need for an upper or lower hybrid denture is usually no more than six.

It’s worth mentioning that implants can also be used to stabilize a removable denture, if you choose to go that route. In that case, the denture just snaps in and out and you still remove it at night when you go to bed.

# What is the Implant Process Like?

Before you ever make a phone call to an implant dentist, it can help to know what to expect. That way you're not caught off guard through a whirlwind of conversations and appointments.

## Your Exam and Consultation

The very first step in the implant process is finding out if you qualify for them and how many you need. During your initial consultation, the dentist will perform a thorough examination to assess your unique oral anatomy and missing teeth needs.

Part of this visit will include a series of X-rays (such as a full mouth image) or even a 3D CT scan, depending on which technology the dentist has in their office. With a 3D "cat scan" the dentist can virtually plan out your implant treatment to locate the best position for each new tooth.

## The Treatment Plan

Once you're cleared for dental implants, the dentist or treatment coordinator will go over all of the options that you have to choose from. At that point, they'll enter in the codes for the procedures and apply your insurance benefits to the overall proposed plan. From there, you can see what's covered (or isn't) and any estimated out of pocket expenses that you'll be responsible for paying for (in other words, what isn't covered by your insurance.) Once you have an estimated dollar figure, you can also opt to get financing for the balance if you don't want to pay for it outright (which was the easiest thing to do in my situation, because the monthly payment plan could be financed at 0% interest up to a year. More on this later!)

## Same Day Full Mouth Restoration

For people who need fast dental implants or need to have remaining teeth extracted and immediately replaced, same day implants tend to be the treatment of choice.

Getting same day full-arch implants does require a bit of detailed planning. You might expect 2-3 appointments leading up to the procedure so that your dentist can take special impressions and have the lab already working on your new smile. Once everything is ready to go, you schedule the appointment (usually in the morning, because it can take a few hours.)

## Traditional Implants

If you're one of the people who gets traditional implants, the process is broken up into smaller phases of treatment over the course of several months. For example, your dentist might extract a tooth then place the implant on the same day or wait for a bone graft to start taking, then install the implant several weeks later. Then, they'll wait for your bone to fuse to the implant before they attach a crown, which takes a few more months.

Ultimately, traditional implants take longer and require that you wear a temporary bridge or denture while your mouth heals. But for some people, they're the best option.

## Why I Went with Teeth in a Day

*I knew that I wanted same day dental implants (some people call them "All-on-4" or "Teeth in a Day") because for me, it wasn't an option to go with missing teeth. Ultimately, the best thing for my oral health was to have the rest of my teeth extracted because of how damaged they were. With same day implants, my dentist was able to install just four implants in my arch and then attach a hybrid denture that was slimmer and more contoured than a natural plate. He attached the hybrid denture that same day and then I went home. Once my mouth adjusted (your bone can change shape after teeth are extracted) I came back to have the appliance updated with a permanent version. I even got to select the color and shape of teeth that I wanted to have!*

# Preparation and Placement

## So far in the implant process, you've:

- Been screened to find out if you qualify for implants
- Received a treatment plan from your dentist
- Decided which type of implants to get

## Other Things to Keep in Mind

Your dentist might need to do a bit of “prep” work, such as adding bone via a graft, or lifting up your nasal sinus lining (if a top tooth is missing) to make sure you have enough space and bone support for your new implants. Otherwise, you can usually jump head first into your treatment.

## Keeping You Comfortable

Since getting dental implants isn't a very invasive procedure, all your dentist *really* needs to keep you comfortable is to numb that area of your mouth with local anesthetic. But for those of us who might feel a little nervous or have trouble sitting still for more than an hour, you can always request sedation. Personally, I just wanted to feel like I was sleeping throughout the entire process, so we went with “twilight sedation” to make me feel like I was napping. The amnesic effects made it to where I couldn't even remember anything.

## Bring Someone with You

Even if you aren't getting sedation during your implant treatment, you probably won't feel like driving yourself home afterward. Ask a family member or close friend to accompany you to the appointment (they can wait in the reception area) and be your designated driver. It can take a few hours for numbing or sedative medications to wear off.

## Recovery

The recovery was the biggest surprise for me when I got dental implants. The most soreness I had was from where the local anesthetic (numbing medication) was injected. Aside from that, there was some minor irritation in my gums where the implants were installed, and the usual soreness where I had a tooth taken out during the same appointment.

As long as you stick to your dentist's home care recommendations, you can usually expect everything to feel back to normal within a couple of weeks.

### **Some of the instructions you'll receive include:**

- Avoid tobacco, alcohol, and carbonated beverages
- Do not drink through a straw
- Gently rinse with warm saltwater to help with inflammation and debris removal
- Do not brush around extraction or implant sites for at least one week
- Use any prescription mouth wash or other medication as directed

## Follow Up

If you're wearing an interim tooth replacement while your body responds to the implants, your dentist will need to install the permanent version about three months after your implant placement.

## Implant Care and Maintenance

Implants need to be cleaned thoroughly every day. They won't get cavities, but plaque can still build up around the implant next to your gums, which can make your gum tissue pull back and jeopardize the implant.

If you have a bridge or hybrid denture like me, you'll want to invest in the right tools to keep it clean. Personally, I like having a water flosser. But some people prefer the thick "super" floss or using a floss threader to get under and around their new teeth.

# Budgeting and Payment Options

Aside from the time investment, the price tag for dental implants is usually the biggest hang-up for most people. There's a huge misconception that implants are going to be this super expensive procedure that hardly anybody can afford.

But here's the thing. Let's compare dental implants to getting bridges or dentures. With those traditional tooth replacements, you're having to update and replace them about every 5-10 years (meaning you'll pay for new ones each time.) So even though implants might cost more up front in the beginning, they're still more affordable than going through 2-3 bridges or dentures. Basically, they offer the best return on investment. It's worth it to pay a little bit more up front to have something that can last forever.

If you have dental insurance, there's a good chance that at least some of your implant procedures are going to be covered by your benefits. Since the implant process is sort of like a giant jigsaw puzzle, some parts of the treatment might be included in your insurance plan while others are not.

For anything that isn't covered by insurance (or if you don't have dental coverage) you can usually get 0% or low-interest financing on the remaining balance. That way you can make affordable monthly payments until the cost of your implants are paid off. Companies like CareCredit or similar dental financing plans usually won't charge you any interest if you pay the balance off within 6-18 months (depending on the terms.) You can usually apply online or in the dentist's office and get a same-day approval.

Since I wanted to get implants even if my insurance didn't cover them, I wound up getting pre-approved for the total cost of the procedure and having my dentist file a claim to my insurance company. When the reimbursement came back from my insurance carrier, I only had to finance the balance of what was left. I also had a couple of thousand dollars saved up to invest in the treatment, so I only wound up financing about 50% of the total cost when all was said and done.

# Traveling from Out of Town

I wanted to see the best implant dentist, as long as it was within a practical driving distance. For me, my decision to work with a provider about two hours from my hometown was actually quite doable.

Although I drove to my initial consult and then back home the same day, I decided to stay overnight on the days I was actually having treatment.

As long as you communicate with your dentist that you're coming in from out of town, they can arrange to book your appointments so that it works out with your traveling schedule. For example, I had my implants placed on a Friday morning (I drove in Thursday night) and was able to have a follow-up first thing Monday morning after resting over the weekend.

If the dentist's office knows that you're traveling in from out of town, they can usually give you the best advice on where to shop, eat, and stay!

## Where I Stayed

Since I was traveling from two hours away to get my dental implants, I had a close friend come with me and we rented a home through VRBO (which is similar to Airbnb.) We each had our own room and a living room to hang out in, along with a full kitchen. It was more convenient than staying in a hotel and actually cost a little bit less. I brought all of the food I knew I would need, so that I never had to leave the house.

Being in a house made it to where we didn't feel cramped together in the same room, plus it gave us extra space to move around. And since I felt back to normal once my sedation totally wore off, my friend was able to come and go without me needing someone there with me every second. It was a win-win for both of us. We made a relaxing weekend out of it!

# My Biggest Questions and What I Found Out

There were a lot of “What if”, “How much”, and “Can I” type of questions I had before I ever saw my implant dentist for the first time. Now that I’ve finally completed my implant treatment, I am constantly talking about the experience with other people who want to replace their missing teeth. And over the dozens of conversations that I’ve had, there always tend to be the same types of questions asked, such as:

## **Is getting dental implants a painful process?**

This was the biggest surprise to me. Getting a dental implant installed was hands-down more comfortable than having a tooth removed. My dentist told me it’s because there aren’t pain receptors inside of the bone where the implant sits. He numbed the gums where the implant was being installed and other than some pressure, I didn’t feel a thing.

## **How expensive are dental implants?**

Surprisingly, implants wind up costing less than other tooth replacements in the grand scheme of things (because you don’t have to keep updating them; they’re a one-time investment.)

Another thing to keep in mind is that you’re not necessarily paying for an implant for each tooth that’s missing. If you need to replace all of your upper teeth, your dentist may only need four implants total to anchor your hybrid bridge/denture on top of them.

## **Is it possible to sleep through the implant surgery?**

I learned that most types of dental sedation don't necessarily "knock you out", but it's still possible to request general anesthesia if you want it. Most sedation appointments make you feel like you're asleep and you'll have amnesia so that you don't remember anything, but the dentist will still be able to talk to you during the treatment.

Depending on how your implant dentist's office is set up, they might offer some types of sedation or be able to bring in an anesthesiologist for IV anesthesia.

## **Are the implants covered by dental insurance?**

Sometimes. Everybody's dental insurance plan is different. Some carriers cover the implant while others only help pay for the restoration (like a crown or bridge) that goes on top of it. A lot of it depends on the type of plan that your employer's HR department picks out, not necessarily the name of your insurance company.

Bottom line, as long as you bring a copy of your insurance card to your dentist's office, their treatment coordinators can do the math for you and show you what's covered or what isn't.

## **Can you tell which teeth are implants and which ones aren't?**

If you have a good implant dentist, then the answer is usually going to be no. The "tooth" (restoration) on top of your implant is made to blend in with the other teeth around it. As long as your dentist and the lab matches the ceramic color, tooth shape, and size, then you should be able to smile without anything looking like it doesn't belong.

## What types of dental implants are there?

Most dental implants are made of the hypoallergenic metal, titanium. Sometimes, ceramic implants or “mini” implants are used, especially if there’s not room for a full implant or part of the implant might show because your gums don’t cover it all.

But when most people ask what type of implants there are, what they really want to know is which type of “tooth” is going on top of it. In that case, your dentist will use a crown if it’s an individual tooth, a bridge if it’s a row of 3-4 teeth, or a longer bridge/denture hybrid if it’s all of the teeth at once.

## Is it possible to replace my missing teeth in just one appointment?

What I learned was that it just depends. Some types of same-day dental implants work well, while other people need something different. Usually, same-day implants are when a person is replacing all of their teeth at one time, or they’re getting the rest of their teeth extracted and the new implants installed during the same appointment (which is what I had done.) Although it’s almost always possible, every teeth-in-a-day procedure is selected on a case by case basis by the dentist performing the treatment.

## Why is the dental implant process so long?

Depending on your situation, traditional implant treatments take longer than same-day procedures because the bone inside of your mouth starts to remodel itself and fuse to the implants after they’re installed. Bone doesn’t grow overnight. It can take at least three months or more before the implant is secure enough for your dentist to attach a “tooth” on top of it. BUT: your dentist will make something for you to wear over the implant while it’s integrating, so you don’t have to have any gaps left in your smile.

# Conclusion

There's no doubt about it. Today's dental implants are the "gold standard" when it comes to replacing your missing teeth. Compared to prosthetics like dentures or partials, implants are practically like having your real teeth all over again.

Compared to investing in treatments like bridges or new dentures every 5-10 years, getting dental implants is the smartest investment I could make toward the health of my smile. Plus, I feel confident showing them off. As long as I maintain them properly, I can expect my implants to last for the rest of my life. Can the restorations on top of them gradually wear out and need to be updated? Yes. But there's a 98% chance that the implants themselves never will. So, I have a stable foundation that lets me smile with confidence, eat all of the foods I love most, and I don't have to struggle with the side-effects of premature aging like other people with tooth loss do.

Since part of my implant treatment was covered by insurance, I financed the remaining balance with CareCredit financing at 0% interest and had it paid off within a year. Had I waited until I simply saved up enough to pay for implants outright, I likely never would have gotten around to scheduling the treatment.

My implant experience isn't unique. A lot of people just like me get implants for a single missing tooth or replacing several teeth at once. The only way to really know what the process is going to involve is to meet with your implant dentist for a one-on-one consultation. Once they see what your individual mouth looks like and determine what your goals are, your implant dentist can work up a treatment plan that's fit your situation and lifestyle. It's not a cookie-cutter experience where everyone gets the same teeth (nor would you want it to be.)

I think it's important everyone knows that scheduling a consultation doesn't mean you're going to be pressured or locked into getting implant treatment. It's a necessity for both you and your dentist to make sure you're a good candidate for the procedure. After that, the choice to get implants is totally up to you!