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EXTREME DENTISTRY

Tooth Implants

By Lye Kim Sheong

There are many ways one can seek youthful results from age reversal therapies, but missing front teeth is not one of them!

If you've got a fine set of full front teeth, good for you, but not everyone is so lucky. For some people, accidents in their youthful years can result in the loss of their centre pearlies, reducing them to wearing dentures or bridges for the rest of their lives.

A better solution for these guys would be tooth implants. Yes, this is another invasive procedure, but it's one that will restore a lot of confidence and reduce a lot of inconveniences.

Implants are not solely used for aesthetic purposes though. Since no one can predict just which set of teeth is going to be knocked out in an accident, it is just as likely that the missing teeth are those used for biting. To have them replaced with implants will greatly improve the quality life of these patients, as they can both look and eat better.

I asked Dr Seah Yang Howe, an endodontic (root canal) specialist, who shuttles between the Root Canal Clinic and Francis Lee Dental Surgery, just how this is done.

(IM)PLANT YOUR STEPS CAREFULLY

1. Planning. Study casts are made of the patient's remaining teeth and a computerised CT scan taken of the jaw.
2. Surgery. The actual surgical procedure as well as the connection of the false teeth/crown onto the titanium fixture are done – on the same visit. The connection is done using a surgical stent constructed during the CT scan previously.
3. Downtime for the surgery is about 5-7 days.
4. Costs:
 - a. Planning cost: S\$500
 - b. Per fixture and crown cost: S\$4k-\$6k
 - c. Surgical stent cost: S\$1.5k-\$2k.

According to Dr Seah, the new porcelain material has greatly improved the appearance of implanted teeth, because the darken shadow of the conventional implant crown is virtually eliminated.

Also, the use of resorable collagen membranes and artificial bone allows the dentist to increase bone volume, so that implants can be placed in areas of very little bone, and yet give the implanted area a fuller, more natural contour.

Great news all round? Not quite. Unfortunately, not everyone is suited for this procedure so check the list below for suitability.

If in doubt, always consult your friendly neighbourhood dental specialist.

THE CAUTION LIST

» Those undergoing chemotherapy/radiotherapy or have a history of radiotherapy to the head and neck region should not do it. This is because healing is severely impaired.

- » Not suited for those with bleeding disorders or are on blood thinners. This is because they would literally bleed non-stop.
- » Patients with systemic conditions which would make them unsuitable for any kind of surgical procedure.
- » Patients with psychosis. This is because they do not understand the limitations of dental implant.
- » Patients with unrealistic expectations of dental implants.
- » Diabetes and hypertension, however, are not contraindications if patients are on medication and the condition is well-controlled.
- » Patients on medication for osteoporosis should exercise caution.
- » Smokers are also advised to exercise caution, because of poor healing response. They are usually advised to cut consumption by 1/3, two weeks before the operation. *

