

Frequently Asked Questions: Implant Therapy

What is a dental implant?

A dental implant is a small device that is used to replace a missing tooth. Implants are surgically placed in the upper or lower jaw, where it will fuse to the jawbone in three to six months. A crown is then attached to a post, also known as an abutment, that extends from the implant above the gum line. The finished implant looks and feels like a natural tooth.

Does Delta Dental cover implant therapy?

Yes (for Delta Dental PPO and Delta Dental Premier programs; DeltaCare programs do not currently cover implant therapy). Effective November 1, 2008, implant therapy is standard coverage in all of our benefit offerings. Implant coverage will be effective at renewal for existing groups with more than 50 enrollees beginning February 1, 2009. Groups with renewal dates prior to February 1, 2009 can elect to add this coverage by notifying their account executive. Implant coverage is effective for pooled groups (groups with two to 49 enrollees) November 1, 2008.

Why is Delta Dental of Illinois adding implant coverage as a standard benefit offering?

We've been closely monitoring advances in implant materials, training and technology and have found that implants are a viable option to replace missing teeth. Advances in dentistry have improved the implant success rate to 98 percent over 10 years, often making it a better option for replacing a single missing tooth in a healthy patient than a bridge. While the fee for a single implant is higher than the fee for a three-unit bridge, implants generally have a lower cost over their lifetime than bridges, which can require repairs and replacements.

What is the benefit level and maximum for implants?

Implants will be included under Coverage C at the benefit level dictated by the group's specific plan design. Implants will have the same time and frequency limitations as other prosthodontic services. Payments for implants will be charged against the enrollee's annual maximum, and will likely exceed the annual maximum.

What are the advantages of implants over other tooth replacement options?

Implants preserve natural teeth better than fixed bridges or partial dentures because they do not rely on adjacent teeth for support, and they look and feel like natural teeth. Implants have a success rate of 98 percent over 10 years.

Do implants work for everyone?

Candidates for dental implants need to have good general and oral health, healthy gums (i.e., no periodontal disease) and adequate bone to support the implant. A thorough evaluation by a dentist will help determine whether an enrollee is a good candidate for dental implants.

How long does treatment take?

Treatment time from placement of the implant to final restoration can range from three to 12 months. The time frame varies according to each individual enrollee's rate of healing.

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Can implants fail?

The percentage of failed implants is very low, but they can fail for the same reasons that cause the loss of natural teeth: poor oral hygiene, periodontal disease, grinding and smoking. Some systemic problems, such as diabetes, can also affect the success of implants. A thorough evaluation by a dentist will help determine whether an enrollee is a good candidate for dental implants.

Are implants a specialty procedure?

No. Any licensed dentist can perform the entire procedure. However, a general dentist may refer implant patients to a specialist (usually an oral surgeon or a periodontist) for the implant surgery, and the general dentist will then place the final crown or other restoration.