

Why should you choose a surgical specialist for surgical procedures?

It is often confusing for patients to determine who should be providing their dental treatment when it involves surgical procedures. The Internet is populated with information about general dentists performing surgical procedures, such as extractions, cosmetic periodontal (gum) surgery, and dental implant placement. However, it is important to keep in mind while sifting through this information that with any surgical procedure there are inherent risks and you should be in experienced hands when undergoing surgery.

Many people assume that because dental implants have such a high success rate (95-97% for 30+ years) that implant placement must be a simple procedure. But the truth is that the high success rate is due in large part to the fact that most implants have been placed by highly skilled specialists who attended surgical residency programs. And these surgical specialists have an in-depth knowledge of surgical techniques, as well as the diagnosis and treatment of potential complications.

Patients should understand that there is a significant difference between residency trained surgical specialists (oral surgeons and periodontists) and dentists without post-graduate surgical residency training. And it is the extensive amount of training and experience of the surgical specialists that enables them to diagnose and manage the potential complications that can occur with surgical procedures.

Some general dentists, prosthodontists, and endodontists have attended training courses on surgical implant placement and have achieved successful results placing implants for their patients. However, most of the non-surgical dentists attempting implant procedures do not know how to manage and treat the potential complications that are routine for surgical specialists.

And as a result of their dentists' insufficient training and experience, patients have experienced serious implant failures and complications that could have been avoided if they had been treated by surgical specialists.



This patient's implant was placed by an inexperienced general dentist. Unfortunately, the implant is placed so high, and at the wrong angle, that a crown cannot be placed on this implant. It is questionable whether placing a new implant with bone grafting will allow specialists to restore the patient's smile.



These implants were placed by a general dentist with inadequate training. The implants have to be removed and the patient will need bone grafting, soft tissue grafting, and new implants. In other words, the case must be redone by a skilled surgical specialist and prosthodontist at a significant cost to the patient.



This failure is devastating for the patient. The implants were placed too high and the patient has lost so much bone and soft tissue that it will be impossible to restore a natural-looking smile.



If you are considering dental implants, the following questions can help you make an informed decision about your treatment and your oral health. Similar questions should be asked if you are considering any other surgical procedures.

1) What is your specialty?

Oral and maxillofacial surgeons and periodontists are the only ADA recognized surgical specialists.

Oral and maxillofacial surgeons treat patients with problem wisdom teeth, facial pain, and misaligned jaws. They also treat accident victims suffering facial injuries, place dental implants and bone grafts, care for patients with oral cancer, tumors and cysts of the jaws. Some oral and maxillofacial surgeons also perform facial cosmetic surgery.

Following dental school, oral and maxillofacial surgeons are surgically trained in a hospital-based residency program for a minimum of four years.

Periodontists specialize in the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of periodontal disease, the placement of dental implants and bone grafts, and treatment of oral inflammation. Periodontists also perform cosmetic periodontal surgery.

Periodontists received an additional three years of specialty education and surgical training beyond dental school.

Implantologists are not accredited specialists. The term Implantologist does not necessarily indicate extensive surgical training and/or expertise in dental implants.

2) What is the extent of your training and experience in implant placement?

Oral surgeons and periodontists will be more than willing to share their extensive training and experience with you, including the numerous continuing education courses they attend each year and the volumes of scientific literature they read. They should also be happy to tell you how many hundreds of implants they place each year and how long they have been placing implants.

If you are considering implant treatment provided by a non-surgical dentist, ask specific questions about the implant training courses they attended, such as the name of the courses, dates, duration, and sponsorship. You should also ask how many courses they attended on the management of complications. Ask how many implants they have placed, and be wary if they only place a handful each year.

3) Ask to speak to other patients. Their experiences can be invaluable in determining if you are in good hands.

4) Speak to the staff about dental implants. If they cannot answer your questions, the office probably does not provide implant procedures on a regular basis.

5) Ask to see before and after photos of cases. Surgical specialists who perform hundreds, or even thousands, of implant procedures are usually happy to share their successful case results with you.

