



Photos by Jay Madden | Periodontist Dr. Robert Pick performs a dental implant procedure on Nicholas Sutton at his downtown Chicago office. He performs between 300 and 400 such procedures a year.

Dental implants filling **THE GAP**

by Michael Schroeder

FROM SMILE TO bite, Sleepy Hollow member Bob Jordan says his dental implants look and feel as real as the teeth they replaced, and function better. “If I didn’t point them out to you, you wouldn’t be able to tell,” he says.

In January, he paid Dr. Martin Kolinski, a highly rated periodontist at Midwest Dental Implantology in St. Charles, \$4,100 to place the two titanium tooth roots in his upper jaw, where Kolinski had previously extracted teeth loosened by gum disease. Then in June, Jordan’s general dentist, highly rated Dr. Charles Showalter at West Willow

Dental in Wheaton, fitted the porcelain crowns, or faux permanent teeth, atop the implants for \$3,200. Jordan’s dental insurance only covered \$930 of the total \$7,300 cost. He paid the remaining \$6,370 out of pocket, but considers the result worth the price. “I feel like I have my own teeth,” he says.

Experts say advances in dental implants over the past several decades have revolutionized replacement of teeth lost or broken due to trauma, decay or disease, or missing due to congenital conditions. Though insurance coverage for implants remains limited and some

people still prefer dentures, which typically cost less upfront, implants attract many patients by offering a permanent alternative with more durability to bite.

“They give the patient a stronger, more beautiful restoration,” says Dr. Steven Kacel, a highly rated general dentist in Northbrook, who places implants and crowns. Like many other dentists, Kacel considers dental implants the standard of care, and he says improvements in design and materials allow implants to adhere better to bone and enhance healing.

Different types of dental providers do implant procedures but patients typically see a specialist for the implant and a general dentist for the crown. Dr. Robert Pick, a highly rated periodontist and a spokesman for the Chicago-based American Dental Association, recommends asking how many implant procedures a provider has done and their experience handling your type of case before scheduling a procedure. “There’s nothing wrong with getting a second opinion,” says Pick, who practices in Aurora and Chicago.

Pick says minimally invasive techniques reduce pain and healing time for patients, while dental CT scans and computer modeling software give providers a more dynamic view of the patient’s mouth and help ensure a more precise fix. But before agreeing to any scan or procedure, experts advise asking about risks — such as radiation

exposure, bleeding and infection — and alternative options.

When a dislodged dental bridge left Aurora member Marie Krienschmidt with a missing front tooth and two broken teeth, she consulted with Dr. Anthony LaVacca, a prosthodontist with highly rated Naperville Dental Specialists, about dental implants and crowns. Deterred by the estimated \$9,000 cost, Krienschmidt, who doesn’t carry dental insurance, opted for a custom-made partial denture, for which she paid \$2,800.

Providers say dentures require regular maintenance and reduce chewing function. But Krienschmidt remains happy with the results three years later. “It looks very good and that again is a function of the skill of the person making it,” she says.^B



Pick says in most cases implants remain an option, even for patients with underlying problems like bone loss, if they receive dental treatment beforehand.