

One of the most critical factors in the success of your dental implant therapy is choosing the right team with the required experience and core competence. Two key team members are recommended: First is a specialized surgeon for the necessary extractions, bone augmentation, and implant placement. The second is a highly qualified restorative dentist who will fabricate the transitional and final teeth.

Here are the critical questions to ask before you engage in dental implant treatments:

What is Your specialty?

- Only two recognized dental surgical specialties receive formal training in implant surgery: Oral surgeons and periodontists. Such specialists receive formal implant surgery training in accredited residency programs.
- **Possible Responses and What You Should Know:**
 - **“I am an Implantologist.”** Note that implantology is not a recognized or accredited specialty! After taking a weekend course or limited immersion programs, a dentist may use that label.
 - **“I am not a surgeon, but I do surgery.”** This is confusing for many patients who assume just because their dentist ‘does surgery,’ they must be a surgeon. That is not the case. Make sure to clarify what they mean and their credentials to support it.

What is the extent of your training in implant surgery?

- Board-certified oral surgeons and periodontists have completed formal training in implant surgery. However, The extent and scope of their skills and knowledge can vary between different training programs.
- For general dentists or prosthodontists: Ask about the scope and type of training programs.
- **Possible Responses and What You Should Know:**
 - **“I have taken several weekend courses.”** - Weekend courses with practice on models or pig jaws do not constitute adequate experience.
 - **“I took a 1-year program in implant dentistry.”** - Most 1-year programs consist of 2-4 weeks of training provided throughout a year. They are not continuous immersion programs.

How many dental implants have you placed?

- Busy surgical specialists typically place at least 100-250 implants a year.
- General dentists or prosthodontists typically place a significantly lower number of implants.
 - **Possible Responses and What You Should Know:**
 - “I place a lot of implants:- Clarify how many per week on the average. If it is less than 10 per month, be cautious.
 - “I have placed several implants.”- This indicates inadequate experience. You may accept the treatment offered if you feel comfortable and there is good dialogue and awareness.

Do you use digital diagnostics and surgical guides?

- No implants should be placed without 3-D CBCT and computer-assisted and fabricated surgical guides.
- ‘Free-handed’ placement and use of conventional X-rays for diagnosis significantly increase the risks of complications.
- Computer-assisted planning is done using implant software with 3-dimensional planning, which is then used to print customized surgical guides for total guidance.
 - **Possible Responses and What You Should Know:**
 - “I only use CBCT when necessary.”- Know that CBCT is ALWAYS necessary. If the dentist only uses it in selective cases, that is a high-risk circumstance.
 - “I don’t use surgical guides”- That means the implants are placed ‘free-handed,’ which increases the risks of complications significantly.
 - “The CBCT is enough for diagnosis. I can do the rest without a guide.”- This provides a better diagnosis, but the ‘free-handed’ approach is hazardous and often leads to complications.

Do you place and restore dental implants?

- Implant placement and restoration are two entirely different disciplines in dentistry. It is challenging for anyone to have top skills in both areas.
- A clinician performing both disciplines may operate outside the core competence in one or both fields.

Do you work with any specialists?

- Almost every general dentist and prosthodontist works with surgical specialists and can consult with them upon request.
- A team approach is critical in implant dentistry success, with each doing what they do best according to their core competence.
- Hesitation to refer to a specialist would be a concerning factor.

What complications have you experienced, and how do you manage them?

- Every clinical experiences complication occasionally, but if it is too frequent, it is concerning
- Does the dentist manage all their complications or refer them to specialists?
- An expert in any procedure should be equally comfortable managing its complications.

Other helpful hints:

- Ask to see before and after photos
- Read online reviews
- Ask questions to staff and see if they are informed