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Your Dental Implant Maintenance Guide

Everything you need to know to protect your investment and keep your implant healthy for life.

Single Tooth Implant Edition |
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Why Maintenance Matters

Your dental implant is built to last decades, but it is not maintenance-free. Just like natural teeth, implants are surrounded by gum tissue and bone that can become inflamed or infected if plaque builds up. The good news: with the right daily habits and regular professional care, you can dramatically reduce your risk of problems and help your implant last a lifetime.

The Key Difference Between Implants and Natural Teeth

Natural teeth have a ligament that acts as a shock absorber and a natural seal against bacteria. Your implant connects directly to the bone without this ligament, which means:

- Infections can progress faster around implants than around natural teeth.
- Early detection through regular monitoring is critical.
- Prevention is far more effective than treatment once a problem develops.

Understanding Peri-Implant Disease

Peri-implant disease occurs in two stages. **Peri-implant mucositis** is inflammation of the gum tissue around the implant without bone loss — it is reversible with proper care. If left untreated, it can progress to **peri-implantitis**, which involves both inflammation and bone loss around the implant. Once bone is lost, it is very difficult to fully restore. Research shows that patients who follow a structured maintenance plan cut their risk of peri-implantitis by more than half.

Your Daily Home Care Routine

Consistent, gentle cleaning is the most powerful thing you can do to protect your implant. Here is your daily checklist:

Step 1 Brush Twice Daily

Use a **soft-bristle manual or powered toothbrush** with a low-abrasive toothpaste. An electric toothbrush with a pressure sensor is ideal — it helps prevent you from scrubbing too hard, which can damage the gum tissue around your implant.

Angle the bristles at 45 degrees toward the gumline and brush gently around all surfaces of the implant crown, paying special attention to the area where the crown meets the gum.

> *Tip: Avoid whitening or highly abrasive toothpastes — they can scratch the surface of your implant crown and make it easier for plaque to stick.*

Step 2 Clean Between Your Teeth Every Day

Plaque loves to hide in the spaces between your implant and your neighboring teeth. This is where the most damaging bacteria accumulate. **Two tools are especially effective:**

Interdental brushes — These small, bottle-shaped brushes slide between teeth and clean the surfaces that a toothbrush cannot reach. They are considered the gold standard for implant care. Your hygienist can recommend the right size for your spaces. Use a gentle in-and-out motion — do not force the brush.

Water flosser — A water flosser pulses a stream of water along the gumline and between teeth. It is especially effective for flushing bacteria from below the gumline around your implant. Use on a medium pressure setting and trace the gumline on both sides of the implant.

Traditional string floss can be used, but studies show interdental brushes and water flossers are more effective around implants. If you use floss, be gentle — aggressive sawing can cut into delicate gum tissue.

Step 3 Target Hard-to-Reach Areas

If the back of your implant crown or the gumline behind it is difficult to reach with a standard toothbrush, an **end-tuft (single-tuft) brush** is a helpful addition. Its small, pointed head lets you trace around the margins of the crown with precision.

Protect Your Implant with a Custom Nightguard

We strongly recommend that every implant patient have a **custom-fitted nightguard** made.

Even if you do not think you clench or grind your teeth, most grinding happens during sleep and many people are completely unaware of it. Here is why a nightguard matters so much for implants specifically:

- **Your implant cannot absorb shock the way natural teeth do.** Natural teeth have a cushioning ligament; your implant is rigidly anchored in bone. Grinding forces — which can be 6 to 10 times stronger than normal chewing — are transmitted directly to the bone and can accelerate bone loss or damage the crown.
- **Nightguards prevent costly mechanical complications.** Cracked porcelain, loosened screws, and fractured abutments are among the most common implant complications — and the majority are linked to excessive bite forces. A nightguard distributes these forces and dramatically reduces your risk.
- **It is an inexpensive form of insurance.** A custom nightguard costs a fraction of what it would take to repair or replace a damaged implant crown. Think of it as a seatbelt for your investment.

If you do not already have a nightguard, ask Dr. Mattox or your restorative dentist about having one made. If you have one, please **wear it every night** and bring it to your hygiene appointments so your team can check the fit and evaluate the wear patterns.

Habits and Health Factors That Affect Your Implant

Risk Factors to Be Aware Of

Smoking and vaping — Tobacco and nicotine products significantly increase the risk of implant failure and peri-implant disease. If you smoke or vape, discuss cessation options with your doctor. It is one of the most impactful steps you can take to protect your implant.

Diabetes — If you have diabetes, maintaining good blood sugar control (HbA1c below 7%) is important. Uncontrolled blood sugar impairs healing and increases your risk of bone loss around implants.

Dry mouth — Saliva protects your mouth from bacteria. Medications, medical conditions, and dehydration can reduce saliva flow. Stay well hydrated and let your team know if you experience chronic dry mouth.

Be Your Own Advocate: A Note About Hygiene Visits

It Is Not Rude — It Is Responsible

Dental implants require specific care that differs from natural teeth, and not every hygienist encounters implant patients regularly. Protocols for instrument selection, probing, and polishing vary from office to office, and your hygienist may not always know which teeth in your mouth are implant-supported.

It is completely appropriate — and we encourage you — to give your hygienist a friendly heads-up at the start of every cleaning appointment. Something as simple as:

"Just so you know, tooth number ___ is an implant. I want to make sure we use implant-safe instruments and check a few things around it today."

This is not a criticism of your hygienist. It is a sign that you are an informed, engaged patient who takes your oral health seriously. Any good hygienist will appreciate the reminder. You are part of the team, and your awareness helps ensure that every visit is as thorough as possible.

What to Expect at Your Hygiene Appointments

Professional maintenance visits are your safety net. Even with excellent home care, professional evaluation and cleaning can catch early signs of trouble before they become serious. Here is what a thorough implant maintenance visit should include — and what you can ask about:

1. Probing Around Your Implant

Probing is the **single most important diagnostic step** for detecting early problems around your implant. Current clinical guidelines — including the 2017 World Workshop on Peri-Implant Diseases, the 2024 AO/AAP Consensus, and the European Federation of Periodontology — all recommend that your hygienist gently probe **six points around your implant at every maintenance visit** using a light touch.

You may have heard that probing around implants is controversial or could cause damage. Research has shown this is not the case — light-force probing does not harm the seal around your implant, and any minor tissue disruption heals completely within about five days. The information gained from probing is irreplaceable: it is the only reliable way to detect bleeding (the earliest warning sign of inflammation) and to track changes in pocket depth over time.

What is measured	Why it matters
Probing depth (mm)	Deeper pockets can harbor bacteria and signal bone loss. Changes over time matter more than any single number.
Bleeding on probing	The most important early warning sign. No bleeding = healthy. Bleeding = inflammation that needs attention.
Suppuration (pus)	A sign of active infection that requires prompt treatment.

What You Can Say

"Could you probe around my implant today and compare it to my baseline? My surgeon recommended probing at every maintenance visit to catch any changes early."

2. Cleaning and Polishing Around Your Implant

The instruments and polishing materials used around your implant matter. Aggressive metal instruments and standard pumice-based polishing pastes can scratch the implant surface, which makes it easier for bacteria to attach and harder to keep clean. Here is what to know:

The Gold Standard: Glycine or Erythritol Air-Polishing

If your hygienist's office has an air-polishing unit with glycine or erythritol powder, this is the ideal method for cleaning around implants. It removes biofilm gently without scratching the implant surface. However, many dental offices do not yet have this equipment — and that is okay. There are excellent alternatives.

When Air-Polishing Is Not Available

Your hygienist can use a **soft rubber cup** (not a bristle brush) at the **lowest speed and lightest pressure** with a **pumice-free, fine-grit polishing paste.** Two products specifically recommended for implants are:

- **Preventech Next —** A pumice-free paste that uses diatomaceous earth, which is significantly less abrasive than standard pumice and safe for implant surfaces and all restorations.
- **Ivoclar Vivadent Proxyt Fine —** A pumice-free, silica-based paste with xylitol that is gentle on implant surfaces while still effectively removing biofilm.

Standard pumice-based prophy pastes (the gritty paste used in a typical cleaning) have a Mohs hardness of 6 — hard enough to scratch titanium and porcelain. Acidulated phosphate fluoride (APF) treatments should also be avoided around implants, as they can corrode the titanium surface.

Hand Instruments

If hand scaling is needed, instruments should be made of titanium, plastic, or carbon fiber — not stainless steel. If ultrasonic scalers are used, they should have PEEK (plastic) tips rather than standard metal tips.

What You Can Say

"I have an implant on tooth number ___ . Could we use a pumice-free polishing paste like Preventech Next or Proxyt Fine around it? And if you need to scale around it, I was told to request implant-safe instruments rather than standard metal scalers."

3. Bite (Occlusion) Check

Your implant crown does not have the same ability to adapt to changes in your bite the way natural teeth do. Natural teeth can shift slightly in their sockets over time; your implant is rigidly anchored in the bone. This means that as your natural teeth move with normal wear and aging, your implant may end up bearing more force than it was designed for.

Excessive force on an implant — especially lateral (side-to-side) forces — can loosen screws, fracture porcelain, or accelerate bone loss. A periodic bite check ensures your implant is sharing the load properly with the rest of your teeth.

What You Can Say

"Could you check my bite on the implant today? I want to make sure it is not taking too much force, especially when I move my jaw side to side." — Your team can use articulating paper to evaluate contact points in both biting down (centric) and side-to-side (excursive) movements. If heavy contacts are found, a simple adjustment can be made at the same appointment.

4. Radiographic Monitoring

Periodic X-rays (usually a periapical radiograph) allow your team to evaluate the bone level around your implant over time. A baseline X-ray is taken when your crown is placed, and follow-up images are compared to that baseline. Your team will determine the appropriate schedule based on your individual risk, but annual radiographs are common during the first few years after placement.

How Often Should You Come In?

The frequency of your maintenance visits depends on your individual risk profile. Dr. Mattox and your hygiene team will recommend a schedule tailored to you:

Risk Level	Typical Factors	Recommended Interval
Lower risk	Non-smoker, no diabetes, good home care, no history of gum disease	Every 6 months
Moderate risk	History of treated gum disease, controlled diabetes, occasional plaque buildup	Every 4 months
Higher risk	Active smoker, uncontrolled diabetes, history of peri-implantitis, poor plaque control	Every 3 months

Your risk level may change over time. As your habits improve and your implant remains stable, your recall interval may be extended. Conversely, if any concerns arise, more frequent visits may be recommended temporarily.

When to Contact Our Office

Please call Innova Dental Implant Institute right away if you notice any of the following around your implant:

- **Persistent bleeding** when brushing or flossing around the implant
- **Swelling, redness, or tenderness** of the gum tissue around the implant
- **Pain or discomfort** when biting or chewing on the implant
- **A loose-feeling crown** or any clicking sensation
- **Pus or a bad taste** coming from around the implant
- **A change in your bite —** the implant feels “high” when you close

Early intervention is always easier and more effective. If something does not feel right, do not wait for your next scheduled appointment — call us.

Quick Reference: Your Daily Checklist

Morning

- Brush implant and all teeth with soft-bristle or electric toothbrush
- Clean between implant and neighboring teeth with an interdental brush

Evening

- Brush implant and all teeth thoroughly
- Use a water flosser along the gumline around the implant
- Use an end-tuft brush on hard-to-reach areas behind the implant

At Bedtime

- Wear your custom nightguard every night

Ongoing

- Stay hydrated to maintain saliva flow
- Attend all scheduled maintenance appointments
- Remind your hygienist which tooth is your implant at each visit
- Communicate any changes in health or medications to your team

Quick Reference: What to Ask for at Your Hygiene Visit

Item	What to Request
Probing	Six-point probing with light force; compare to baseline
Polishing	Pumice-free paste (Preventech Next or Proxyt Fine) with soft rubber cup; or glycine/erythritol air-polishing if available
Instruments	Titanium, plastic, or carbon fiber scalers; PEEK-tipped ultrasonics
Bite check	Articulating paper in centric and excursive movements
Nightguard	Bring it — have fit and wear patterns evaluated
X-rays	Periapical radiograph per your team's recommended schedule

Your Implant Is an Investment — and We Are Here to Help You Protect It

Dr. Mattox and the Innova team are committed to supporting you at every stage of your implant journey — not just the surgery, but the decades of healthy function that follow. If you ever have questions about your home care routine, your maintenance schedule, or anything you notice about your implant, please reach out to us.

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This guide is for informational purposes and does not replace individualized clinical advice from your treatment team. Your specific maintenance plan may differ based on your unique health profile.