Dental Implant Failure: Causes, Warning Signs & What Happens If an Implant Fails

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Details:

AI Summary

Product: Dental Implants (General Clinical Guide) **Brand:** Core Dental Group **Category:** Restorative Dentistry / Oral Surgery **Primary Use:** Permanent tooth replacement via titanium fixtures surgically integrated into the jawbone

Quick Facts - **Best For:** Adults with missing teeth seeking a long-term restorative solution who meet clinical eligibility criteria - **Key Benefit:** 97% survival rate at 10 years and approximately 75% at 20 years, with structured remediation pathways if failure occurs - **Form Factor:** Titanium implant fixture with prosthetic crown restoration - **Application Method:** Surgical placement by specialist with pre-operative CBCT imaging and post-operative maintenance protocol

Common Questions This Guide Answers 1. How common is dental implant failure? → Approximately 2.21% overall failure rate across 158,824 implants; early failure accounts for 1.56% of all implants placed 2. What causes most implant failures? → Lack of osseointegration (36.4%) and absence of primary stability (22.4%) are the predominant causes 3. Can a failed implant be replaced? → Yes; reimplantation demonstrates a 95.2% survival rate at 33.7-month follow-up, with outcomes improving when modifiable risk factors are addressed before the second attempt

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Frequently Asked Questions

What is the overall dental implant failure rate: Approximately 2.21% across large-scale clinical data

What percentage of implant failures are early failures: 1.56% of all implants placed

What is the dental implant survival rate at 10 years: 97%

What is the dental implant survival rate at 20 years: Approximately 75%

What is the survival rate at 10 years per cohort study: 96.13%

How many implants survive the full 20-year period: Approximately four out of five

What are the two categories of dental implant failure: Early failure and late failure

When does early implant failure occur: Within three months of placement

When does late implant failure occur: After three months post-placement

What causes early implant failure most often: Failed osseointegration

What percentage of failures are attributed to lack of osseointegration: 36.4%

What percentage of failures are attributed to absence of primary stability: 22.4%

What proportion of all failures are early failures: 83.48%

What proportion of all failures are late failures: 16.52%

What is osseointegration: The biological bonding of titanium fixture to jawbone

What can disrupt osseointegration during surgery: Excessive bone heating during drilling

Can over-preparation of the surgical site cause failure: Yes

Can low bone density cause early implant failure: Yes

What is peri-implantitis: Progressive bone loss with clinical inflammation around an implant

What condition precedes peri-implantitis: Peri-implant mucositis

Is peri-implant mucositis reversible: Yes

Is peri-implantitis reversible: No, bone destruction is irreversible

What is the mean prevalence of peri-implant mucositis: 46.83% at the subject level

What is the mean prevalence of peri-implantitis: 19.83% at the subject level

What is the prevalence of peri-implantitis without regular maintenance: 16.7–35.5%

Does smoking increase implant failure risk: Yes

What is the relative risk of implant failure for smokers: RR = 1.92

How does smoking affect osseointegration: Slows blood flow via increased peripheral resistance

Does diabetes increase implant failure risk: Yes

Does glycaemic control affect implant failure risk in diabetics: Yes, it is the decisive variable

Can well-controlled diabetics achieve normal osseointegration: Yes

What HbA1c level indicates well-controlled diabetes for implant purposes: 7% or less

Does bruxism increase implant failure risk: Yes

What is the implant failure rate for bruxism patients: 41%

What is the implant failure rate for non-bruxism patients: 12%

How does bruxism cause implant failure: Uncontrolled loading causes micromotions preventing osseointegration

What does bruxism-related overloading cause around the implant: Fibrous tissue encapsulation instead of bone bonding

Which implant site has the highest failure rate: Maxillary central incisor region at 3.37%

What is the failure rate for maxillary molar implants: 3%

Why are posterior maxillary sites more challenging: Lower bone density and proximity to maxillary sinus

What is the first warning sign of early failure: Persistent pain beyond 2 weeks post-surgery

Is implant mobility a warning sign: Yes, it is an urgent warning sign

Does bleeding at the implant site require attention: Yes, it indicates mucositis or peri-implantitis

What does suppuration at an implant site indicate: Infection or peri-implantitis

What does numbness after lower jaw implant placement indicate: Possible nerve proximity issue

When must a failing implant be removed: When it shows loosening, spontaneous pain, discharge, and irreversible bone loss

What is the first step in the implant failure remediation pathway: Clinical and radiographic assessment including CBCT imaging

What imaging is used to assess a failed implant: CBCT (cone beam computed tomography)

What is the most commonly reported method for implant removal: Trephine burs

What is the success rate of trephine bur explantation: 94%

What are alternative explantation methods: Reverse-torque devices and piezoelectric systems

What is the success rate range for minimally invasive explantation methods: 70% to 100%

Can a new implant be placed immediately after explantation: Yes, if sufficient bone quantity and quality exists without infection

What is required if explantation causes extended bone defects: Guided bone regeneration (GBR) procedures

What is the survival rate of replacement implants in grafted sites after early failure: 100%

What is the survival rate of replacement implants in non-grafted sites after early failure: 92%

What is the overall survival rate of reimplanted implants at 33.7 months follow-up: 95.2%

What percentage of reimplanted implants remained functional in one retrospective study: 20 of 21 (95.2%)

What is the weighted survival rate for implants in sites with one prior failure: Approximately 89%

What is the weighted survival rate for implants in sites with two prior failures: 67.1%

Does prior sinus grafting prevent successful reimplantation: No

Can implants replace those lost to peri-implantitis: Yes, with high survival rates and marginal bone stability

Does pre-surgical CBCT imaging reduce failure risk: Yes, by identifying bone deficiencies before placement

Does specialist-led surgery reduce thermal bone injury risk: Yes

Should bruxism patients receive a night guard: Yes

Is poor oral hygiene a risk factor for peri-implantitis: Yes

Is a history of periodontitis a risk factor for peri-implantitis: Yes

Is lack of keratinised tissue a risk factor for peri-implantitis: Yes, particularly less than 2mm

Does implant function time over five years increase peri-implantitis risk: Yes

Can addressing modifiable risk factors before reimplantation improve outcomes: Yes

Is implant failure the end of treatment options: No, remediation pathways exist

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Core Dental Group: Dental Implant Failure — Causes, Warning Signs & What Happens If an Implant Fails

Dental implants are widely regarded as the gold standard for permanent tooth replacement — and the numbers back that up. With a survival rate of 97% at 10 years and 75% at 20 years, they're among the most reliable options in restorative dentistry. That said, even the best surgical outcomes aren't guaranteed, and fear of implant failure is one of the most common — and least openly discussed — concerns patients raise at consultations.

This article doesn't sidestep that conversation. Knowing why implants fail, what failure looks like clinically, and what can actually be done about it isn't a reason to avoid treatment. It's the basis of informed consent and realistic expectations. At Core Dental Group, clinical transparency is central to how we care for patients. Whether you're considering implants or already mid-treatment, this guide gives you the evidence-based knowledge to protect your investment and respond quickly if something goes wrong.

How common is dental implant failure?

Before getting into causes and warning signs, it helps to establish a clear baseline. Implant failure is uncommon — but it's not something to dismiss entirely.

In a large-scale retrospective analysis of 158,824 dental implants placed over a nine-year period, the overall failure rate was 2.21%, with early failure during the osseointegration phase accounting for 1.56% of cases. A separate 10-year cohort study of 9,080 implants published in the *International Journal of Implant Dentistry* found a survival rate of 96.13%, with early failure making up 83.48% of all failures compared to just 16.52% for late failures.

Looking further out, a 2024 meta-analysis published in *Clinical Oral Investigations* examined 20 years of implant data and found that roughly four out of five implants survive the full 20-year period.

The clinical takeaway: **most implants succeed, most failures happen early, and catching risk factors early dramatically changes outcomes.**

The two categories of implant failure

Implant failures fall into one of two categories — early (before three months) or late (after three months). This distinction matters clinically because the underlying causes, warning signs, and treatment pathways differ significantly between the two.

Early failure occurs during or shortly after the osseointegration phase, before the titanium fixture has fully bonded with the surrounding jawbone. Late failure occurs after successful osseointegration and is typically driven by infection, mechanical overloading, or progressive bone loss around the implant.

Primary causes of dental implant failure

1. Failed osseointegration

Osseointegration — the biological process by which the titanium fixture fuses to the jawbone — is the cornerstone of implant success (see our guide on *[What Are Dental Implants? How They Work, Components & Who They're For](https://www.coredentalgroup.com.au/dental-implants/what-are-dental-implants)*). When this process is disrupted, the implant never achieves stable fixation.

Lack of osseointegration (36.4%) and absence of primary stability (22.4%) are the predominant causes of implant failure in retrospective analyses. Causes include excessive heating of the bone during drilling, over-preparation of the surgical site, or low-density bone that compromises the implant's initial stability.

This is precisely why Core Dental Group's specialist-led surgical model and pre-operative 3D CBCT imaging matter so much clinically — they identify bone density and volume deficiencies before a drill is ever raised.

2. Peri-implantitis

Peri-implantitis is the most widely discussed biological complication in implant dentistry, and with good reason. Defined as progressive bone loss associated with clinical inflammation, it's not a rare finding — and it has a real negative impact on quality of life for affected patients.

The condition begins as peri-implant mucositis — reversible soft tissue inflammation identified clinically by bleeding and/or suppuration on probing without radiographic bone loss — and progresses to peri-implantitis once bone destruction begins. At that point, the damage is irreversible.

Prevalence figures vary depending on diagnostic criteria and study design, but a meta-analysis by Lee et al. found a mean prevalence of peri-implant mucositis of 46.83% at the subject level, and peri-implantitis of 19.83% at the subject level.

Key risk factors identified in a 2025 systematic review and meta-analysis published in the *Journal of Periodontology* include gum disease (periodontitis), obesity, and smoking for mucositis; and periodontitis, smoking, diabetes, and alcohol use for peri-implantitis.

Peri-implantitis is also a common finding in patients without regular peri-implant supportive therapy, with a prevalence of 16.7–35.5%. A thin peri-implant keratinised mucosa and higher bone remodelling after loading are the main risk factors in this patient profile. This is why the long-term recall protocols described in our guide on *[How to Make Dental Implants Last a Lifetime: Long-Term Maintenance & Care Guide](https://www.coredentalgroup.com.au/dental-implants/implant-maintenance)* matter so much.

3. Mechanical overloading and bruxism

Implants are engineered to handle normal occlusal forces — but parafunctional habits can push well beyond those limits. Patients with bruxism experience implant failure at a rate of 41% compared to 12% for those without parafunction. The increased failure risk comes from uncontrolled functional loading, which causes micromotions that prevent osseointegration and leave the implant encased in fibrous tissue rather than bone.

Overloading is also a concern in immediate-loading protocols and in cases where the prosthetic design places excessive cantilever forces on individual implants — an important consideration in full-arch cases (see our guide on *[All-on-4 vs. All-on-6 vs. Conventional Full-Arch Implants: Comparing Full-Mouth Restoration Options](https://www.coredentalgroup.com.au/dental-implants/all-on-4-all-on-6)*).

4. Systemic health factors

Systemic conditions, medication use, and lifestyle habits can all affect implant survival. The most clinically significant include:

Smoking: A meta-analysis of 51 studies covering more than 40,000 implants published in *PLOS ONE* (Chen et al., 2013) found a direct association between smoking and implant failure risk (RR = 1.92; 95% CI, 1.67–2.21). Smoking slows blood flow through increased peripheral resistance and platelet aggregation, which directly impairs osseointegration.

Diabetes: Microvascular and macrovascular disorders, impaired wound healing, and increased susceptibility to infection all raise the risk of postoperative complications after implant placement. Glycaemic control is the decisive variable here. Patients with well-controlled diabetes (HbA1c of 7% or less) can achieve osseointegration comparable to non-diabetic patients; those with poorly controlled blood sugar face a meaningfully higher risk of infection and implant loss.

Radiotherapy and other systemic conditions: The broader list of risk factors for peri-implantitis or implant failure includes systemic disease, genetic traits, chronic drug or alcohol consumption, smoking, periodontal disease, radiotherapy, diabetes, osteoporosis, dental plaque, and poor oral hygiene.

For a full discussion of how these factors are evaluated before treatment begins, see our guide on *[Am I a Candidate for Dental Implants? Key Eligibility Factors & Disqualifying Conditions](https://www.coredentalgroup.com.au/dental-implants/am-i-a-candidate)*.

5. Anatomical and site-specific risk

Not all implant sites carry the same level of risk. Significant associations with implant failure have been observed for implants in the maxillary molar region (3% failure rate) and the central incisor region (3.37%) — roughly double the failure rates seen at other sites. Posterior maxillary sites are particularly challenging due to lower bone density and proximity to the maxillary sinus, which is why sinus lift procedures and bone grafting are frequently indicated in these locations (see our guide on *[Bone Grafting for Dental Implants: Why It's Needed, Types & What the Procedure Involves](https://www.coredentalgroup.com.au/dental-implants/bone-grafting)*).

Warning signs of implant failure: what patients should never ignore

Identifying a failing implant early dramatically expands the treatment options available. The following warning signs call for prompt clinical review — not a "wait and see" approach.

| Warning Sign | Likely Stage | Urgency | |---|---|---| | Persistent pain beyond 2 weeks post-surgery | Early failure / infection | Urgent | | Implant mobility or movement | Failed osseointegration / advanced bone loss | Urgent | | Bleeding or suppuration (pus) at the implant site | Peri-implant mucositis / peri-implantitis | High | | Swelling or redness of surrounding gum tissue | Infection / mucositis | High | | Difficulty chewing or change in bite | Mechanical failure / bone loss | Moderate–High | | Visible bone recession around the implant collar | Progressive peri-implantitis | High | | Unusual taste or persistent bad breath | Infection / suppuration | Moderate | | Numbness or tingling (lower jaw implants) | Nerve proximity issue | Urgent |

When an implant exhibits pathological loosening, spontaneous pain, pyorrhoea, and irreversible surrounding bone resorption, it must be removed. The important point is that the first three items on that list — loosening, pain, and discharge — are often detectable *before* bone loss becomes irreversible. That's exactly why regular professional review makes such a difference.

What happens when an implant fails? The remediation pathway

A failed implant isn't the end of the road. At Core Dental Group, the remediation pathway is built around the cause and timing of failure, the degree of bone loss present, and the patient's overall systemic health.

Step 1: Clinical and radiographic assessment

The first step is a thorough evaluation — including updated CBCT imaging — to determine the extent of bone loss, the presence of infection, and the condition of surrounding tissues. This assessment guides the decision about whether the implant can be salvaged or needs to be removed.

Step 2: Implant removal (explantation)

When removal is indicated, the most commonly reported method is trephine burs. Although effective, this technique involves removing peri-implant bone and often requires additional grafting procedures. It remains a well-validated option with a 94% success rate, particularly when other methods fall short or some bone removal is acceptable.

Newer, less invasive approaches — reverse-torque devices and piezoelectric systems — are also in use, with success rates ranging from 70% to 100%.

Step 3: Site management and re-grafting

After explantation, the condition of the site determines the next step. Where sufficient bone quantity and quality exist without infection, a new implant can be placed in the same session. If explantation leaves more extended bone defects, guided bone regeneration (GBR) is needed first to correct the buccal bone plate before reimplantation.

Step 4: Replacement implant placement

The clinical evidence for reimplantation is encouraging. When initially inserted implants failed predominantly due to lack of osseointegration, second implant surgery led to 100% and 92% survival rates in additionally grafted and non-grafted sites respectively — confirming that prior sinus grafting is no obstacle for a second attempt.

A retrospective reimplantation study found that after a mean follow-up of 33.7 months, 20 of 21 reimplanted implants remained functional, giving an overall survival rate of 95.2%. Implants replacing those lost to peri-implantitis are also a viable option, showing high survival rates and marginal bone stability.

It's worth noting that second implantation after early and/or late failure carries a weighted survival rate of approximately 89% for sites with a history of one failure, dropping to 67.1% in sites with two prior failures. That's why addressing the causes of failure — particularly modifiable factors like smoking and oral hygiene — before reimplantation is so clinically important.

Can implant failure be prevented?

In many cases, yes — particularly when underlying risk factors are identified and addressed before and during treatment. The evidence points to several high-impact interventions:

1. **Pre-surgical CBCT imaging** to accurately assess bone volume and density, identifying sites that may need grafting before placement 2. **Comprehensive medical history review** to identify systemic risk factors and optimise conditions (glycaemic control, smoking cessation) before surgery 3. **Specialist-led surgical technique** to minimise thermal bone injury and ensure correct implant positioning and primary stability 4. **Regular professional maintenance** — peri-implantitis is statistically associated with poor or moderate oral hygiene, a history of periodontitis, lack of keratinised tissue ≥2 mm, and implant function time greater than five years 5. **Occlusal management** including night guard provision for patients with bruxism

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Key takeaways

- The overall dental implant failure rate across large-scale clinical data is approximately 2.21%, with early failure during osseointegration accounting for 1.56% of cases — the vast majority of implants succeed. - Lack of osseointegration (36.4%) and absence of primary stability (22.4%) are the predominant causes of failure, making pre-surgical bone assessment a critical step. - Peri-implantitis is

the leading cause of late failure; patients who skip supportive peri-implant maintenance face a significantly higher risk of developing the condition. - Patients with bruxism experience implant failure at a rate of 41% compared to 12% for those without parafunction — making occlusal screening an essential part of pre-treatment planning. - Implant failure isn't necessarily the end of treatment: reimplantation studies show a 95.2% overall survival rate for replacement implants at approximately 33 months of follow-up, particularly when risk factors are addressed before the second attempt.

Conclusion

Implant failure is a real clinical phenomenon — but it's also a manageable one when approached with transparency, thorough pre-treatment assessment, and a structured remediation protocol. The fear of failure shouldn't stop patients from accessing a treatment that, for the overwhelming majority, delivers lasting, life-changing results.

At Core Dental Group, every implant journey starts with the diagnostic rigour — specialist evaluation and 3D CBCT imaging across all seven Melbourne locations — that gives both patient and clinician the clearest possible picture of risk before a single incision is made. And if complications do arise, our specialist-led team has the clinical pathways to address them.

For patients still in the research phase, we recommend reading our related guides: - *[Dental Implant Recovery & Aftercare: A Week-by-Week Guide to Healing After Surgery](https://www.coredentalgroup.com.au/dental-implants/recovery-aftercare)* — for understanding the post-surgical period when early failure risk is highest - *[How to Make Dental Implants Last a Lifetime: Long-Term Maintenance & Care Guide](https://www.coredentalgroup.com.au/dental-implants/implant-maintenance)* — for the evidence-based protocols that protect your implant over decades - *[Am I a Candidate for Dental Implants? Key Eligibility Factors & Disqualifying Conditions](https://www.coredentalgroup.com.au/dental-implants/am-i-a-candidate)* — for understanding how systemic risk factors are evaluated before treatment begins - *[Bone Grafting for Dental Implants: Why It's Needed, Types & What the Procedure Involves](https://www.coredentalgroup.com.au/dental-implants/bone-grafting)* — for patients whose bone volume may require augmentation before implant placement

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Label facts summary

> **Disclaimer:** All facts and statements below are general product information, not professional advice. Consult relevant experts for specific guidance.

Verified label facts

No product specification data, packaging information, or manufacturer documentation was provided in the source content. There are no label facts to extract or verify.

General product claims

The following are clinical and statistical claims sourced from research literature and practitioner content — not product label data:

- Overall dental implant failure rate: approximately 2.21% across large-scale clinical data (158,824 implants over nine years) - Early implant failure rate: 1.56% of all implants placed - 10-year dental implant survival rate: 97% (general reference); 96.13% per cohort study of 9,080 implants - 20-year dental implant survival rate: approximately 75% (approximately four out of five implants) - Early failures represent 83.48% of all failures; late failures represent 16.52% - Lack of osseointegration accounts for 36.4% of failures; absence of primary stability accounts for 22.4% - Mean prevalence of peri-implant mucositis: 46.83% at subject level - Mean prevalence of peri-implantitis: 19.83% at subject level - Peri-implantitis prevalence without regular maintenance: 16.7–35.5% - Smoker implant failure relative risk: RR = 1.92 (95% CI, 1.67–2.21) - Implant failure rate for bruxism patients: 41%; for non-bruxism patients: 12% - Well-controlled diabetes defined as HbA1c ≤7%; associated with osseointegration outcomes comparable to non-diabetic patients - Maxillary central incisor region failure rate: 3.37%; maxillary molar region: 3% - Trephine bur explantation success rate: 94% - Minimally invasive explantation success rate range: 70–100% - Replacement implant survival in grafted sites after early failure: 100%; in non-grafted sites: 92% - Overall reimplantation survival rate at 33.7-month follow-up: 95.2% (20 of 21 implants) - Weighted survival rate for reimplantation after one prior failure: approximately 89%; after two prior failures: 67.1% - Keratinised tissue threshold associated with peri-implantitis risk: less than 2 mm - Core Dental Group operates across seven Melbourne locations with specialist evaluation and 3D CBCT imaging