

PHOTO BY BRIAN GLENN

How to Save Your Teeth

When a patient's bite is misaligned, teeth can become worn down, resulting in a decrease in function and cosmetic integrity. Fortunately, for many patients, teeth can be restored long-term.



Frank Bombaci

PHOTOS COURTESY OF DR. BLANK



BEFORE



AFTER



STEPHEN G. BLANK, DDS

Frank Bombaci's teeth had suffered a lot of wear and tear.

"When I relocated to Florida from Long Island, New York about four-and-a-half years ago, I had a lot of fillings and my gums were bleeding," confides the retiree. "I realized I needed to find a good dentist. So, after reading an article about Dr. Blank, I scheduled an appointment with him."

Stephen G. Blank, DDS, practices cosmetic and functional dentistry in Port St. Lucie.

"Frank first presented to our office in February of 2005," remembers Dr. Blank.

During Frank's first examination, Dr. Blank examined his bite, and found that his teeth did not hit in harmony with one another.

"When we grow teeth, the upper and lower may not meet together in a happy manner," says Dr. Blank. "Sometimes, the bite can be self-destructive, but often patients do not realize it because it is what they have;

it's what they are used to. So it is my job as a dentist to determine whether or not they have a healthy bite.

"When I initially examined Frank, I measured his teeth and found that his central incisors, or two upper front teeth, measured only eight millimeters tall," recalls Dr. Blank. "Because a typical central incisor is ten-and-a-half to eleven-and-a-half millimeters tall, I knew that a significant amount of tooth had been worn away. Additionally, the outside enamel layer was missing on the biting edge."

Dr. Blank explains that the *cuspid*s (third tooth to the left or right of center, sometimes called the eye tooth) play a crucial role in the bite's formation and function and helps protect the bite when we chew.

"Frank's cuspid's were so worn down that his bite was what patients often refer to as *slippery*, or more like a cow," says Dr. Blank. "Rather than his cuspid's guiding Frank's jaw into place and guaranteeing a proper fit, his jaw was sliding in big circles, mowing everything flat."

"This misalignment resulted in his enamel wearing down, and as enamel is worn off, the dentin layer is revealed." Dentin is the yellow-brown substance that lies

under the enamel and protects the innermost part of the tooth. "This is like an M&M where the candy coating is gone, exposing the softer chocolate center. Once the dentin is exposed, the wear continues faster and faster. Dentin wears down between five and eight times more rapidly than enamel. This meant that Frank's teeth were self-destructive and were destined to wear down to an even greater extent. His condition was already affecting the sensitivity of his teeth. The bleeding of his gums was not due to neglect, but was because of the wear pattern on his teeth. Food was able to get pushed into the spaces between the teeth and irritate the gums."

"Dr. Blank and his staff are fantastic," observes Frank. "They are all very pleasant, and Dr. Blank is so informative, particularly in comparison to other dentists I've had. He explained everything in great detail and cautioned me that, over time, the condition would worsen. He wanted to save my teeth, and recommended I have them treated."

"I agreed."

The treatment

"Good treatment planning sets up the sound tooth structure necessary for a healthy mouth," notes Dr. Blank, "which is critical to feeling good and to long-lasting dental work."

"Dental cases can be either functionally or cosmetically driven. In Frank's case, it was functionally driven. We wanted to prevent food from getting pressed between his teeth and irritating his gums, and we didn't want his teeth to be subjected to any more cracking or breaking."

For Frank, Dr. Blank used a bonding material without adhesive, which allowed him to mock up or simulate what size teeth would work well with Frank's bite and would also look the best aesthetically.

Using the resin, Dr. Blank shaped Frank's teeth and created an ideal new occlusion that functioned in harmony with his TM joints (temporomandibular joints join the lower jaw and skull). Dr. Blank then took impressions, which were used to create plaster model copies of Frank's new bite.

"Just as we do for all of our patients, we mounted those study models on our articulator, which is a chewing simulator," educates Dr. Blank. "We evaluated Frank's bite in the laboratory, where we don't have the patient's tongue, cheeks or lips in the way."

"Our treatment was to remove all of Frank's old fillings and any cavities under them, and replace the old fillings with bonded tooth-colored materials," reviews Dr. Blank. "Then, over the top of that, we restored his teeth with all-ceramic individual crowns. We treated all of his teeth in order to restore their shape and build up their height to the point they had been before the wear pattern began."

Using a digital Tec-Scan III to show both the timing of the contacts and their intensity, Dr. Blank was able to adjust Frank's bite until it was balanced and even. In this case, Dr. Blank was able to change Frank's bite by restoring all of his teeth. The T-Scan verifies the results and allows the patient to participate in the final results.

Long-term results

Once Dr. Blank had Frank's mouth functioning properly, he was then able to complete the dentistry that will last.

"My teeth are perfect," marvels Frank. "Their function is much better, and they look fantastic."

"Everybody rants and raves about them, how good they look."

"Teeth can last, as long as the bite is healthy," assures Dr. Blank.

"My teeth were treated over four years ago, and they've stood up very well, no problems at all. I see Dr. Blank and his hygienist for regular maintenance every six months, and that's it."

"He's the best." **FHCN**—Kris Kline

Dr. Blank invites you to visit his website at www.PSLDENTIST.com

Gold Medal Winner

Dr. Blank was awarded four gold medals at the 2007 Florida Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry (FACD) Annual Scientific Session competition, which is designed to reward excellence in clinical cosmetic dentistry. The FACD is an organization devoted to seeking improvements in the science and art of cosmetic dentistry.



Stephen G. Blank, DDS, is a 1982 graduate of Northwestern University Dental School in Chicago. He has since completed intensive continuing education studies. Dr. Blank has studied TMJ under Mark Piper, MD, DMD, at the Piper Education and Research Center. He has completed the course continuum at the Dawson Center for Advanced Dental Studies. Dr. Blank was a clinical instructor with the Hornbrook Group, teaching dentists from all parts of the country in live hands-on courses on the various aspects of smile design, occlusion, full mouth reconstruction, and complete patient care. He is a facilitator/mentor with the Dental Boot Kamp program. Dr. Blank enjoys teaching dental teams around the country.

View your own Virtual Smile Makeover

For a free Virtual Smile Makeover by Dr. Blank, go to www.PSLDENTIST.com and follow the instructions.

For that healthy smile

Dr. Blank and his staff look forward to meeting the readers of **Florida Health Care News**. For more information or to schedule an appointment, please call **(772) 878-7348**. His office is located at **184 NW Central Park Plaza** in Port St. Lucie.