

Kate Getzendanner was suffering with tinnitus.

“When I was in my twenties, I had an automobile accident and my mouth hit the steering wheel,” remembers the retired reading specialist from Maryland. “Doctors watched my teeth for a year, but neglected to do a follow-up on my jaw. Then, about ten years ago, when I was still in Maryland, I had all of my mercury fillings replaced, which required that my jaw be open for over two hours at a time. Perhaps because of the car accident, the filling procedures were too much for my jaw and I developed tinnitus.

“I was really scared because the ringing in my ears was terribly annoying and it was causing pressure in my head,

STEPHEN G. BLANK, DDS

but when I sought the help of an ENT [ear, nose, and throat doctor], he said, *No cause, no cure, you live with it.*

“Then I consulted my general physician, and he said, *No cause, no cure, you live with it.*

“It wasn’t until I spoke to my Maryland dentist that I got the answer I was looking for; he said he thought he could help me. Once he realigned my jaw, although I still had some hissing, I did get *some* relief.”

Before moving south, Kate asked her dentist in Maryland for the recommendation of a dentist in Florida who was trained in neuromuscular issues, in case her tinnitus worsened, and he referred her to Stephen G. Blank, DDS, who practices cosmetic and functional dentistry in Port St. Lucie.

“I feel so fortunate that I thought to ask,” reflects Kate, “because after moving down here, I did something I should not have done: I bit into an apple, which triggered my tinnitus worse than ever. I couldn’t eat. I couldn’t sleep. I was in misery, so I scheduled an appointment with Dr. Blank.”

The diagnosis

“Kate came to see us for the first time on June 7, 2005,” recalls Dr. Blank. “After an examination, we were able to determine that her cartilage disc, which serves as a cushion between the ball and socket joint of the jaw and allows the lower jaw to glide over the upper jaw, was displaced.”

According to Dr. Blank, that displacement can cause not only clicking and popping sounds in the jaw joint but also inflammation just in front of the ear canal: “The jaw area is a complex network of muscles and nerves and when the bite is misaligned, those muscles and nerves can be affected, causing the ringing sounds known as tinnitus. Patients that have clicking and popping will often say, *I have TMJ.*

“The key to resolving Kate’s problem was to realign and stabilize her bite.”

Dr. Blank began by taking impressions, or models, of Kate’s teeth and mounting them on an articulator, which is a chewing simulator.

“The articulator enables us to evaluate the way our patient’s upper and lower teeth come together,” educates Dr. Blank. “We use the same blue bite paper that is often used by dentists after placing a filling or crown. By using the articulator, we can see how the teeth are meeting each other and in what order they make contact.”

Ideally, the teeth will meet evenly and simultaneously with equal intensity.

“In Kate’s case, her first contact was on the left side,” describes Dr. Blank. “Although she thought her teeth were meeting evenly, when we examined them we were able to determine a premature contact on the left, which meant they were not meeting in harmony with her facial muscles.

Stop the Ringing

While tinnitus, or ringing in the ears, is usually thought to indicate an ear problem, in many cases it is a symptom of a misaligned jaw. For these patients, dentists trained in resolving neuromuscular problems can diagnose and treat the condition.

Kate says that Dr. Blank saved her sanity.



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“We also listened to her TM joints with a Doppler listening device, much like the one they use on mommies’ bellies to hear babies’ heartbeats. We could hear clicking and popping with the cartilage slipping out of position, which is also symptomatic of a bad bite, or malocclusion.”

In order for Kate’s teeth to meet together, says Dr. Blank, her jaw had to shift to the side: “The joint is not in the center of the socket, and that constant shifting and moving of the jaw to meet requires the muscles to be busy when they should be at rest. This causes muscle spasms, tired face, and inflammation which can result in TMJ dysfunction and tinnitus.”

Once Dr. Blank completed the lab analysis, he performed selective bite adjustments on the lab models of Kate’s teeth, filing and reshaping the teeth so they met more evenly.

“Following that, we verify that these adjustments will put the jaw back in alignment,” explains Dr. Blank. “If this is not the case, we will develop another plan, but in Kate’s case we could see it would be successful.

“We also verify our findings with what is called a T scan. The T scan is a digital sensor which performs somewhat like the blue bite paper except that it measures which teeth are inhibiting a good bite and measures the timing and intensity of the tooth contacts. As the patient

bites down, the scanner takes the data and inputs it on the computer screen. It literally makes a little movie of the half-second it takes to close the teeth together. We play it back in slow motion so both the patient and the doctor can see the dynamics of the bite.”

The treatment

Dr. Blank made the selective bite adjustments on Kate’s teeth, and then performed another teeth scan analysis.

“Kate’s teeth now have simultaneous contacts with equal intensity, so no one tooth is hitting first and causing her jaw to shift,” analyzes Dr. Blank. “That allows the teeth to feel better and the jaw to be in harmony with the muscles; headaches are reduced, sensitive teeth get better, tooth wear is decreased, and in Kate’s case, tinnitus was reduced.

“Well, Dr. Blank saved my sanity,” insists Kate. “The dentist in Maryland had helped me, but he didn’t have any of the sophisticated equipment that Dr. Blank has so his results were not as good.

“People who have never experienced tinnitus can’t appreciate how terrible it is. If Dr. Blank hadn’t helped me, I would still be going crazy.

“I now see Dr. Blank for my regular check-ups, and my husband, Tom, sees him, too. We actually drive about forty minutes for each appointment, but it is well worth it. Dr. Blank’s hygienist Raquel is one of the best I’ve ever been treated by, and as far as dentists, Dr. Blank is *by far* the best.”

FHCN—Kris Kline



PHOTO COURTESY OF DR. BLANK

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

Gold Medal Winner

On September 29, 2007, Dr. Blank was awarded four gold medals at the 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 graduate of Northwestern University Dental School in Chicago. He has since completed intensive continuing education studies, and he and his dental team have completed the Dental Organization for Conscious Sedation program. Dr. Blank is 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.

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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.