

You DO Have Enough Bone for an Implant

It happened again. A patient comes into my office and says that she was told that she doesn't have enough bone for a dental implant. There may have been a reason to say that 20 years ago. But now?

There are two major advances which make a lack of bone a thing of the past: 1. The method of x-ray diagnosis and 2. The graft materials to help you to replace missing bone.

Let's look at the x-ray first. The traditional x-ray views your mouth in two dimensions. It can see height and width. It can't see thickness, the most important third dimension. The way we see that third dimension is with a CT-Scan. Yes, there are dental CT-Scans, made specifically to determine bone availability for dental implants. There are several dental CT-Scans in dental offices throughout Brevard County. There's even a mobile dental CT-Scan van that will go to dental offices that are without that technology. And what is really great is that dental CT-Scans produce only about 2% of the radiation of a medical CT-Scan. CT-Scans give us a complete surgical view of your bone before we do the surgery. I can't tell you how often I find good dental implant-supporting bone in a CT-Scan that I am unable to see in traditional dental x-rays.

What's even better is that we can do your dental implant surgery first on the computer, and design a template from that virtual surgery that we place in your mouth, making your actual surgical procedure easier and faster.

While dental implants have made improvements since the basic design was introduced in 1982, the monumental improvement that has occurred is in the materials available to graft bone. There are dental bone powders that are used to fill extraction sites to prevent bone shrinkage. There is bone putty that we place on your existing bone to increase its thickness. There are blocks, and wafers, and sponges all designed for the same function, to restore missing bone. There are methods to harness the growth factors from your blood to increase the speed of bone healing. And there are liquid grafts that recruit your own stem cells from surrounding tissue to produce new bone as well as grafts that have "built-in" stem cells.

So whether your sinus is too low or your bone has diminished, or you've been told that you don't have enough bone, there are answers for you.

No bone? Get a dental CT-Scan. Once the diagnosis has been made, the answers are simpler and more predictable than ever before.

Dr. Lee Sheldon practices dental implant and periodontal therapy in Melbourne. He is an associate clinical professor at the University of Florida. Dr. Sheldon is a featured guest on "The Elder Hour" on WMEL radio and "Aging with Dignity" on WBCC television.

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