SOLID BITES WITH DR. LEE SHELDON



40 Years Ago, I Placed My First Implant

On May 16, 1986, a landmark moment occurred for me and for our practice—I placed my first dental implant. It replaced a missing molar on the lower left side, and I remember it clearly. The night before, I reviewed the procedure step by step as I fell asleep. I woke up doing the same thing.

By today's standards, it would be considered a relatively simple procedure. In 1986, it was anything but simple. Implants came in a single length. They had to be cut to size, sterilized chairside in a glass bead sterilizer, allowed to cool, and then placed. It was a careful, deliberate process—and one that improved significantly over time.

Dental implants gave us something we had never truly had before: the ability to replace missing teeth with something fixed rather than removable. As often happens with new technology, however, we initially gave implants more credit than they deserved. At one point, it seemed they might replace root canals, periodontal therapy, and more.

Over time, experience brought perspective. Every tool has its place. Implants are an excellent option, but they are not a universal solution.

Saving natural teeth remains important. When teeth can be predictably preserved, that is still the best choice. At the same time, advances in CT imaging, digital planning, and implant materials have made implant therapy more predictable than ever.

After 40 years, I see implants differently—not as a replacement for everything, but as one important tool. And perhaps that perspective is their greatest contribution.

