

For a Dazzling New Smile . . . Open Wide

Smile. Today's high-tech cosmetic dentistry not only gives you bright, flawless, healthy teeth--but modern safe, fast and comfortable procedures really give you something to show off your new pearly whites about.

More than ever before, our contemporary style-conscious culture reinforces the benefits of looking your best. People of all ages are seeking extra assistance to enhance their appearances. "Research shows that one of your most memorable qualities is a bright, healthy, smile," notes Stephen H. Guss, DDS, a principal of Cosmetic Dentistry in Fairfield, Conn., a three-partner practice specializing in creating beautiful, healthy and natural smiles. Besides, what good is looking your best, if you cannot show off your happiness about it?

Fortunately, making over your smile is perhaps the easiest, fastest and most pain-free way to brighten your looks and life--often accomplished in just several visits to a dentist. And the dozens of before and after photos adorning the Cosmetic and Reconstructive Dentistry's walls attest that *makeover* is indeed the correct term.

"Today, almost anything is possible in cosmetic dentistry, and most people are amazed at the speed and impact of the results. An attractive new set of pearly whites can be as simple as professional whitening or as involved as several cutting edge procedures. It all depends on what you want to achieve," explains Richard M. Goldman, DDS another principle in the practice. Eager to get started?

Here's how to begin.

"Visit a good cosmetic dentist and discuss your goals," advises Goldman. "Our practice offers complimentary consultations, and many others do as well. The dentists will discuss your problems and corrective procedures--often there are several options to address a specific problem."

"But always remember," adds Donald Miller, DDS, the third partner in the practice. "A great smile starts with healthy teeth and gums. Any cosmetic procedure should be preceded by a thorough dental examination and treatment of any underlying tooth or gum problems."

From there, a wide range of procedures is at your disposal, from porcelain restorations and veneers to high-tech whitening. Cosmetic and Reconstructive Dentistry uses all the latest techniques. Here they provide an overview:

Tooth Whitening

"Professional tooth whitening is a great new procedure. Almost everyone can benefit from a dazzling new smile. "If you have naturally dark enamel or discolorations, the results will be dramatic," Dr. Guss says. The pain-free procedure takes only about an hour and involves coating teeth with a special gel, which is then activated by laser light. Cosmetic Dentistry uses an advanced system developed by NASA scientists and the inventor of the LASIK system, which uses blue spectrum light technology and a wavelength-specific process.

A professional laser lightening is significantly more effective, faster and safer than home procedures. Typically, the professional process lightens teeth 8 to 15 shades, while a self-administered process is only effective for 3 to 4 shades. Moreover, home lightening regresses after a few months, while professional lightening lasts years, often permanently with proper maintenance. The procedure has no negative effect on fillings and tooth enamel. It is painless—you can even nap in the dentist chair and wake up with a dazzling new smile.

Porcelain Veneers

Are you embarrassed by unsightly spaces between your teeth, chips, significant discoloration or even mildly crooked teeth? Quickly and easily, new high-tech porcelain veneers work modern magic on problems that years ago required expensive and complicated capping. Ultra-thin porcelain veneers, which look and feel natural, are bonded to your teeth improving looks, strength and structure. They can add width, length and even slightly reshape your natural look.

Veneers are undetectable to the naked eye and may be used on a single tooth or an entire smile. "This is a relatively new procedure and can easily and affordably accomplish what was almost unimaginable a few decades ago," comments Miller. Unattractive, damaged and structurally weakened teeth get a new lease on life.

Dr. Miller also notes that similar but less extensive problems also can be solved through more affordable bonding. The process involves applying a putty-like resin made up of glass particles in a plastic matrix that has been specially prepared to match your natural tooth color. The high-tech putty fills in chips and alters the shape and dimensions of the tooth surface. When exposed to a special high intensity light, the material fuses to your natural enamel, also adding strength and structure with the cosmetic enhancement. Finally, it is buffed to a smooth, natural luster. "This is an excellent solution for a range of problems," Miller says. "A good dentist will be able to tell you whether veneers or bonding is right for you."

Natural Composite Fillings

A smile should sparkle with natural warmth, not silver fillings. For years, silver amalgam was used to fill the holes or cavities left in teeth when dentists drilled decay. Over time, amalgam corrodes and blackens. For people with numerous cavities, the result is often a glaringly unattractive smile. Today, cavities can be filled with natural-looking composite fillings made of today's tooth-colored bonding material. To create a more naturally beautiful smile, silver fillings

can simply be replaced. The process is fast and painless and may be just what some people need for the smile of their dreams.

Implants

If you are missing a tooth or wear dentures, implants can give you a second chance at a great new permanent smile. Dental implants, aptly named, are actually surgically inserted into your jaw, providing an anchor for a custom-created replacement tooth. With the look and feel of the real thing, implants are extremely stable because the jawbone actually begins to grow around them. They require no special care and seem so real, you may forget they are not. If your gum tissue and jaw are healthy, you are a good candidate for implants.

Custom Crowns

Crowns also aren't what they used to be, with space-age ceramics replacing traditional metal to create a stable inner core. Thanks to these ceramic centers, today's crowns have a translucency and vitality that is remarkably similar to natural enamel, with the same strength and durability of yesterday's metal crowns. "When done correctly," comments Dr. Guss, "these crowns blend beautifully and virtually indistinguishably with natural teeth. Crowns are typically used when the size of a filling exceeds a certain proportion of the tooth or to give unattractive teeth a whole new look. Soon, dentures may become a relic of the past. But today, many people still wear a full set of replacement teeth. However, if you are a denture wearer, your appliance itself probably is out of date. New, state-of-the-art dentures are more comfortable, durable and natural looking than ever before. They actually can be more attractive than real teeth, blending with hair coloring and skin tone.

Old, ill-fitting dentures simply make you look, well, old. Over the years, they can wear out and cause pain when chewing. "Today, there is a greater emphasis on denture aesthetics than in the past, and modern dental materials open a whole new world of possibilities," explains Goldman. "Talk to a dentist about the improvements. But remember, many denture wearers are candidates for permanent implants, rather than removable appliances, if desired."

Select The Right Dentist

What should you look for in a dentist to perform these procedures? Experience, naturally, is key. Of course a practice that specializes in cosmetic restorations will have broader experience and a better perspective on your case.

Also remember that cosmetic dentistry is as much an art as a science. The ability to judge restoration tooth color, shape and size calls for finely tuned aesthetic judgment. For a restoration, a specialist will be more attuned to the cosmetic results than an oral surgeon who may focus primarily on the procedure's medical value. Ask any dentist for patient references so that you can see the end results and judge for yourself.

Another big plus is a practice with an in-house lab for creating the restoration itself. This is a complex process often involving an understanding of the dentist's goals, judgment about restoration color size and shape as well as the technical ability to execute this from wax mold to final result. Typically caps, bridges and veneers are created in large commercial labs where the dentist, patient and laboratory technician never meet. "A small but growing number of practices—less than 1 percent nationwide—create these in-house. As a leading edge aesthetic practice, we realize that this is something of an art form and is one of the most important parts of any cosmetic procedure. Therefore, the practice has its own lab with three skilled in-house professionals," comments Dr. Guss.

"Look for a practice willing to discuss your options. Often, there are several ways to address a problem, and the patient should play a key role in the decision- making process," advises Dr. Guss. "Book a few consultations and compare and go with a practice that makes you feel comfortable."