

A LASTING IMPRESSION: A GREAT SMILE

It is accepted that a great smile is a great social asset and you are remembered for the great smile you have. So it is not surprising that a survey of adults found the following results:

- * 92% agree that an attractive smile is an important social asset.
- * 88% say that they always remember someone with an especially attractive smile.
- * 85% find that an unattractive smile is less appealing to the opposite sex.
- * 74% agree that an unattractive smile will negatively impact career success.
- * Only 50% of respondents are satisfied with their smiles.

Some of the most common complaints people have with their smiles are those that they have had since childhood, such as discolored, gapped or crooked teeth. Other problems may be those that developed in adulthood, such as cracked or worn down teeth. Then there are teeth, which have had fillings that have discolored the front teeth, or crowns that no longer match the color of the natural teeth, which turned a darker color.

Whitening your teeth would generally be the first consideration. Very often when your teeth are whiter, minor discrepancies such as slight crowding of your front teeth will almost disappear. Your dentist may advise that all that you need may be the use of a home-bleaching product available over the counter. Failing that, you may ask your dentist to make home-bleaching trays that use a higher concentration of bleaching gel. Over a period of weeks you should see dramatic improvement. For those who want a whiter and even more dramatic result, in-office bleaching procedures that will whiten your teeth within one hour are available.

For gapped front teeth, bonding is generally the initial consideration. Cosmetic bonding calls for the dentist to incrementally build up spaces between the teeth with various shades of composite materials and then “paint” surfaces with additional composites of different hues, chroma and translucency to match the adjacent teeth. Techniques employing “optical illusion” in shaping the composites give the teeth the appearance of normal-sized teeth, without the gaps. This can be done without reducing the teeth. With some precautions and proper care cosmetic bonding can last many years without chipping or breakage.

In the case where the patient desires veneers, because of the strength and durability of enhanced porcelain, this procedure calls for reducing a slight amount of tooth structure to accommodate the thin layer of porcelain that will cover the surface of the teeth. The shell of thin porcelain is bonded over the tooth. Veneers do not change color or shine over time, and allow the dentist to do a complete makeover of the smile. Stunning results are achieved with this technique.

For crooked teeth, orthodontics is always a good alternative. Where bands and braces are impractical, veneering can bring changes in a matter of weeks. Transparent plastic “retainers” to

move teeth also may be an alternative in some cases.

Where teeth are worn down, previously filled or capped, veneers or porcelain crowns may be a good solution. However, in the case where teeth have been worn down due to involuntary nighttime clenching or grinding, a bite guard should be worn so that new crowns or veneers would not be worn down again.

If you are among the 50% who are not satisfied with your smile, see your dentist for the solution that will work best for you. And if you are among the fortunate 50%, who are satisfied with your smile, see your dentist regularly so that you can maintain that great smile for a lifetime.