

Cosmetic Dentistry: Much More than Just Tooth Whitening!

Upon first glance, many people make the assumption that cosmetic dentistry is all about having the whitest brightest teeth (sometimes to a point that even appears unnatural – appropriate perhaps only for the flashbulbs of a red carpet event). Patients today are further bombarded with messages that the use of whitening pens, strips and toothpastes are the main methods used to achieve this goal. But the truth of the matter is cosmetic dentistry goes well beyond merely the colour of your smile to include every aspect of both the appearance, and yes, even the practical function, of your teeth. This leaves a person with not just the physical but also the emotional benefits of a cosmetically appealing and healthy smile.

It was not very many years ago that dental work functioned well, but often looked - esthetically horrible. Years ago, the materials available for dentists to work with were mostly metal, not tooth coloured, and from a technical standpoint did not really do much to strengthen or augment the remaining tooth structure. Dentists would remove parts of teeth, drill away decay, and as a last resort, pull teeth that couldn't be saved. Thankfully in today's dentistry - that has all changed! As technology has advanced at a rapid pace, we now have strong dental materials that can repair tooth problems while also providing a BEAUTIFUL smile and mimic the appearance of natural teeth.

Why Has Cosmetic Dentistry Become So Popular?

Have you ever been embarrassed by your appearance? If you have, you are not alone. In fact, it's hard to find someone who hasn't answered "yes" to this question at one point of another. It's been shown that the "Baby-boomer generation" (people who were born post-World War II until about 1964) are one of the largest demographic groups in history, and they seek out ways of slowing the aging process. This desire to fight the effects of aging at all costs has led to the proliferation of Cosmetic surgi-centres, weight-loss clinics, laser eye surgery centres, cosmetic dermatology clinics; and Cosmetic dentistry, dentistry's contribution to this trend. People have always disliked the dark lines around the margins of crowns, the appearance of clasps on partial dentures, crooked teeth, black mercury-metal fillings, large gaps between their teeth, brown or yellow teeth ---and the list goes on. Cosmetic dentistry can now fix all these undesirable tooth conditions – often with minimally invasive procedures and with options to suit most budgets.

The ‘Age of Augmentation’ Changed Everything

In the 1960’s, dental bonding was discovered. (Bonding, for those who aren’t familiar with the term, is a process by which we can add tooth coloured resin to the tooth in a very durable way. The tooth coloured resin (made of a durable plastic material which) is applied to the tooth and hardened with a special light. It’s used for multiple purposes – often to restore or improve a person’s smile in various ways. This ability to add tooth-like material to teeth in a conservative way started a revolution in the way dentistry was performed. We no longer had to remove perfectly healthy tooth structure, for example in order to prevent tooth restorations from falling out. This was the dawn of the “age of augmentation”. The augmentation trend has continued to this very day in both dentistry and medicine alike. The focus now is to save and preserve healthy body parts - and add to them to enhance their beauty and function.

This trend became very apparent a few years ago with the appearance of TV shows like Extreme Make-Over and The Swan. Modern medical and dental treatments can make people look healthier, younger, and generally more attractive. I have found that 2 main things have happened since television shows like these exposed cosmetic treatments to the general population;

1. People are looking at themselves more and (are thinking more about) examining their appearance.
2. People, aware of the available changes - are now asking esthetically geared questions like “what can I do to improve my smile?”

Ask your dentist what your best cosmetic treatment options are

You might find that a lot of dentists feel uncomfortable raising the issue of appearance to people in their offices. As a result they often don’t mention it, even if they see teeth that could look better than they do. It’s a sensitive issue for some patients – and no one wants to point out something that might make someone uncomfortable or self conscious.

I have a patient who one day asked me what she could do to make her smile look better. She had been a patient of mine for over 10 years and I had no idea how much her teeth embarrassed her. She always covered her mouth when she talked and laughed. She rarely smiled. I had never asked, and she had never let me know how she felt about the appearance of her teeth ... until that day. Porcelain veneers changed her entire personality. Her self-consciousness disappeared, and her confidence level soared.



DR. MARTY FRANKEL
SMILES BY DESIGN



Before



After

Porcelain Veneers

What are some of the benefits and drawbacks of cosmetic dental treatment?

Benefits:

- The ceramic and resin-based materials that we can work with today are beautiful. If you are looking to improve the appearance of one or more teeth it can most definitely be done.
- Most of these procedures are very conservative ... in other words we do not have to remove a lot of tooth structure. In fact, we preserve as much healthy tooth structure as we can.
- The smile transformation can often be done in one to three appointments.
- The bonding process seals the tooth and can help to eliminate tooth sensitivity.
- Bonding fillings and aesthetic on-lays in back teeth can actually strengthen the teeth and help prevent them from cracking and breaking.
- These procedures can help people feel more confident, improve their self-esteem, and often provide what patients describe as life-changing results.

Drawbacks:

- Some tooth structure is removed in the preparation process (the process of getting the tooth ready for the final restorations) . . . this means that the procedures are not reversible (once you have the treatment performed you can not return to the original state of the tooth – of course most people will tell me that they don't like their teeth anyway)

- If the lab or the dentist are inexperienced in these treatments, like any professional without a lengthy track record, the outcome can appear different or less pleasing than anticipated.
- Nothing lasts forever. Therefore, if we live long enough, the restorations will need to be replaced at some point in time – as normal wear and tear occur due to the high functional demands placed on the teeth.

If you would like to improve your smile, ask your dentist about your options. Often you'll be pleasantly surprised with the various options that are available to make small or large changes to your smile. Another thing you should do is find out the level of training and experience your dentist has with cosmetic dentistry. Many dentists appear to offer "cosmetic" services, but have done very little study or work in that specific area. Often those dentists will refer a patient to a colleague who has a track record with cosmetic work – and work hand in hand to ensure a wonderful result – leaving their patient feeling well taken care of. Dentistry is both an art and a science and no one dentist can be artful in all areas of the field. We rely on each other to work together to provide the optimal combined care for our patients. A skilled cosmetic dentist can create beautiful smiles and literally change your life.

There Is a Whole Range of Cosmetic Dental Treatment Choices

There are many ways to address an aesthetic dental problem. The options range from very simple to very complex possibilities. Some of the treatment options include:

- Tooth whitening – If your teeth look good but you just want them whiter, this is the way to go. Tooth whitening is long lasting, relatively inexpensive, and requires very little maintenance. I strongly believe that it should be supervised by a dentist for safety reasons – and also to ensure the most pleasing outcome. Although over-the-counter products do work, there is potential for misuse and I do not encourage people to use them. Do-it-yourself solutions can be great for the den or cottage – but when it comes to your health and wellness, have a professional take the lead.
- Direct resin/cosmetic bonding – This was the original *cosmetic dentistry*. It can be used to improve the appearance of one to numerous teeth. A skilled dentist can build beautiful bonded restorations. Although dental materials are improving significantly the long term beauty of these restorations can often start to fade at around the 5 to 8 year

mark. This timeline is increasing each day as new materials are developed and refined. A clean diet and great homecare can also help to prolong the aesthetic lifespan of these materials.

- Tooth coloured fillings – These fillings can now be virtually invisible.... And cosmetics are not just for the front teeth! We can fill back teeth with these as well. Additionally, these fillings not only make the teeth look better but help reinforce them thereby making them stronger.
- Porcelain veneers – Porcelain veneers are the ultimate cosmetic restoration. They can be made to look absolutely beautiful by a GREAT dental lab and dentist team! When they are bonded well and the bite (the way your teeth fit together when you close your mouth) is properly adjusted, veneers can last for years and years - looking fantastic the whole time. Veneers are now the “Hollywood Smile” (replacing the previous use of cosmetic “crowns” which required that teeth be shaved into little stumps to have crowns placed on top). In contrast, veneers are very conservative; they preserve tooth structure and require minimal preparation.
- Aesthetic porcelain on-lays – These are the conservative counterpart to porcelain veneers for back teeth. These on-lays replace existing fillings, add strength to the teeth to close to the strength of a perfect tooth, they last a long time, and they look FANTASTIC! In my mind they are the ultimate modern-day dental restorations.
- Metal-free crowns – Metal has been used in dental crowns for many years. The metal adds strength to the restoration, but also makes it difficult to create beautiful life-like restorations. Metal free crowns are now available that are strong, long-lasting, and aesthetically pleasing.
- Full mouth reconstruction – Full mouth reconstruction (FMR) is not for everybody. For those who would benefit by it, FMR rebuilds the teeth in a beautiful harmonious way with aesthetic and functional benefits, balancing the “bite” and putting it in harmony with the rest of the body. Not all dentists have been trained to do this type of work - and I would advise finding someone with the knowledge, skill, and experience to perform this very complex type of service.

- Dental Implants to replace missing teeth – Until a few years ago, dental bridges were considered to be the ‘best’ way to replace missing teeth. Bridges are still an excellent way to replace teeth, but dental implants are now considered not only state-of-the-art, but standard-of-care by many professionals in the field. An implant is employed to replace the root of a missing tooth and a crown can be built on it to replace the tooth itself. Not only are these very functional, but they are easy to floss, brush, and maintain - with the final restoration looking and feeling like a “real” tooth.
- Orthodontic treatment including full braces – For people who are unhappy with the appearance of their teeth (but the teeth are structurally sound), or have crowded teeth which might lead to periodontal problems, or a “bad” bite, orthodontics is an excellent route to take. At the end of the day you still have your own teeth intact and with orthodontic modifications – they can look and feel wonderful.
- Invisalign – Invisalign can address many of the same problems that traditional braces do, but without the appearance and same discomfort of braces. Invisalign (sometimes known as invisible braces) was developed for adults and is an exciting and fun way to improve appearance – often over a short period of time.

Regardless of the appearance you have or the treatment that your dentist recommends, the rewards of having a bright, well aligned smile can be life changing!

If you feel that Cosmetic Dentistry is for you or someone you know, please feel free to contact me for more information about this exciting modality of treatment – or make an appointment and ask your dentist! We’re all here to create healthy and beautiful smiles - and to give our patients the benefit of our training and expertise.