

Teeth are Wearing White This Year

Smile makeovers have become very popular as a person's smile will always make a first and lasting impression. The appearance of one's smile not only affects self esteem and self perception but it also may have an impact on personal and professional success and happiness. Smile makeovers with dental veneers are a great way to improve the appearance of your smile.

What are dental veneers?

Dental veneers are wafer thin, custom made dental restorations that cover the front surfaces of teeth. They are a conservative restoration as they require only slight preparation of tooth structure. Most often veneers are made of translucent porcelain which has optical and reflective properties similar to teeth. This gives the porcelain veneer a natural look. Tooth structure that is damaged, worn, or chipped can be effectively repaired with dental veneers. In addition, the porcelain has coloration properties than can them effective at covering up tooth discoloration. Discoloration can be from medication taken as a child (i.e., Tetracycline), staining or old unsightly restorations. Lastly, veneers can be made to correct crowded and mal-aligned teeth or teeth with spaces between them.

Who is a candidate for dental veneers?

Prior to any cosmetic dentistry, which includes dental veneers, the teeth and supporting gum and bone must be healthy. Your cosmetic dentist will do a thorough examination of your teeth, gum tissue, and your "bite" as well as take dental X-rays to fully diagnose the health of your mouth. There may be times when the tooth has suffered from too much damage or is so weakened that other cosmetic procedures are indicated. Crowns, bridges, and dental implants can be done in combination with dental implants within the same arch of teeth. People with heavy grinding or clenching patterns may not be suitable candidates for dental veneers.

What is the process?

The first step is selecting and meeting with your cosmetic dentist. There should be active participation between you and the dentist so you can explain the cosmetic and functional goals in which you are trying to achieve. At the consultation visit, impressions may also be made so that the final shape and form of the veneers can be designed prior to the actual preparation and fabrication. Portrait and facial photographs may also be taken to aid in the design of the veneers to blend and match the features of your face and smile.

There are two visits involved in making veneers. The first will be to prepare the teeth and the second to bond them into place several weeks later. To prepare a tooth for a veneer, your dentist will remove about ½ millimeter of enamel from the tooth surface, which is an amount nearly equal to the thickness of the veneer to be added to the tooth surface. Next, your dentist will make a model or impression of your teeth in which the veneers will be fabricated. Finally, temporary veneers will be placed to avoid noticing the prepared teeth and to prevent sensitivity.

At the bonding appointment your dentist will place the veneers on your tooth temporarily to examine the fit, color and the overall cosmetic change. Next, to prepare your tooth to receive the veneer, your tooth will be cleaned, polished and etched – which roughens the tooth to allow for a strong bonding process. A special cement is used to permanently bond the veneer to your tooth.



PHOTO: THOMAS BALSAMO

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The final steps involve removing any excess cement, evaluating your bite and making any final adjustments to the veneer as necessary.

Are there any disadvantages?

The process to making veneers is usually irreversible as it involves the removal of small amounts of tooth structure. Although infrequent, dental veneers can also chip, crack, or become dislodged. The color of the veneer can not be changed through bleaching once it is cemented into place.

Dental veneers play a large role in cosmetic dentistry. They allow for a change in tooth shape and color with minimally invasive procedures. U