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ACADEMY of GENERAL DENTISTRY | COSMETIC DENTISTRY

WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT COSMETIC DENTISTRY

Your dentist can perform a variety of cosmetic procedures to improve your smile – from subtle changes to major repairs. There are many options for treating teeth that are discolored, chipped, misshapen or missing. Your dentist can reshape your teeth, close spaces, restore worn teeth or alter the length of your teeth. Common procedures include teeth whitening, caps, crowns, veneers, bonding and reshaping.

What is teeth whitening?

Teeth whitening is a common and popular chemical process used to lighten teeth. Some people get their teeth whitened to remove stains, while others just want a brighter smile. Discoloration, which occurs when a tooth's enamel wears down, can be caused by medication, coffee, tea and cigarettes as well as genetics and natural aging processes. Teeth whitening can be performed by your dentist in the office or at home under dental supervision.

What is bonding?

Bonding (also called direct bonding) is the use of tooth-colored material to fill in gaps or chips or to change the color of teeth. Bonding lasts several years and often requires only a single office visit. Bonding is more susceptible to staining or chipping than other forms of restoration. Bonding is also used to fill small cavities, to close spaces between teeth or to cover the entire outside surface of a tooth.

What are veneers?

Veneers are thin pieces of porcelain or composite materials that are permanently placed over the front of teeth to change their color or shape. Veneers are used on teeth with uneven surfaces; on teeth that are chipped, discolored, oddly shaped, unevenly spaced or crooked; or on teeth that already have large fillings placed. Veneers can be used to treat some of the same issues as direct bonding and crowns.

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What should I look for in a cosmetic dentist?

In order to make sure your dentist is skilled in cosmetic dentistry, the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry recommends that you ask your dentist for the following before undergoing treatment:

- *Before and after photos.* These photos will allow you to examine the results of other patients being treated by the dentist to make sure his or her work fits your dental needs.
- *References.* References will give you a sense of the quality of care the dentist provides.
- *Proof of continuing education (CE).* Be certain that your dentist has taken CE courses to keep him or her up-to-date with the latest techniques in clinical cosmetic dentistry.

Your dentist can answer your questions about techniques you can see to improve your smile.

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