

# Give yourself a new reason to smile



Dentist Martina Syron tells Louise Atkinson how to make the best use of new advances in cosmetic dentistry

New techniques mean it's becoming far easier to make your teeth whiter, more sparkly, and younger-looking for less cost and with less intervention. The first step, though, is to ensure your teeth are healthy – ask a good dentist for a full assessment, dealing with any cavities and gum disease before considering improving your smile. But be warned that the biggest challenge to many cosmetic dentists is placing patients' care ahead of financial gain.

## No more black fillings

There's nothing more ageing than a mouth full of black, crumbling fillings, but the good news is that the material used in white fillings has evolved. Previously, they weren't considered to be particularly strong and were prone to discolouration. But the latest composite materials are less absorptive, so less likely to stain, and more resistant to wear and tear. If dark fillings bother you, my advice is to not have them replaced with white composite, but to wait. Then, when an old filling needs redoing, ask for a white one. I'd never recommend taking out fillings for cosmetic purposes, as the process can precipitate damage.

A heavily filled tooth that's holding up a thin layer of once-white enamel wall can now be replaced with a moulded "inlay", which is a porcelain cast (halfway between a white filling and a crown). It looks white and protects the original tooth. **COST** Inlays from £250, and white fillings from £95 to £150 per tooth.

## The ultimate cover-up

**Bonding is an established restorative technique that's becoming increasingly popular.**

White composite material is painted over a too short, too slim or pitted tooth to smooth its appearance. Done properly, it can fill indents, make front teeth look straight, lengthen short teeth and fill gaps between teeth – all without the need for injections, drilling or cutting of the teeth. A lot of dentists don't offer it, however, because it requires an artistic touch and has to be applied freehand with a paintbrush.

Although bonding has been available for years, the materials are getting better and the results are increasingly natural – I find it difficult to see which teeth I've bonded even in my own patients. A dentist can touch up discoloured areas around the gums that don't respond well to whitening and will match these to the whitened shade once it settles.

You can now also use tints and "opaquers" underneath the bonding agent to get rid of otherwise difficult-to-budge discolouration. **COST** From £175 per tooth.



## Veneers: a warning

Veneers have become a worrying fad, and although they have a place in extreme circumstances (if teeth are broken or twisted, or if the gum line is very varied), like many dentists, I'm concerned about their widespread effect on healthy teeth. In ten years time, I'm sure we'll be looking back in horror at teeth we've mutilated in the name of aesthetics. Preparing a tooth for a veneer sometimes means shaving off its surface. If the veneer cracks or

comes off (few last beyond ten years), the tooth will usually have to be further stripped to accept a new veneer. If too much enamel is removed, the dentine layer will be exposed and veneers don't stick well to dentine.

Veneers are like false fingernails, but when the nails are removed, the damage to your natural nail eventually grow out. When you've had veneers, however, there's no going back. **COST** £600 per tooth.

## Lighten up

Teeth whitening has been given a bad name by inexperienced dentists, or even beauty salons that illegally try their hand with inferior products. But it is possible to whiten teeth effectively and safely.

Discolouration can be caused by a number of factors: smoking; red wine; common antibiotics taken in childhood, which can cause a grey tinge; a dead tooth, which may look darker than the rest; or enamel hypoplasia (brown marks where enamel hasn't formed properly). So the solution may vary according to the problem.

Research seems to indicate that low concentrations of bleaching agent applied over time works more effectively than quick-fix laser whitening, which is more likely to make teeth sensitive. The best solution is putting a little bleach on custom-moulded trays (like gumshields), which are worn every night for two to six weeks. This slow, sustained release gives more predictable and long-lasting results – teeth stay white for up to ten years, and even then, won't return to the original shade.

Celebrities' "fridge-white" smiles are often a sign of veneers (see above), not bleach-whitened teeth. No matter how much bleaching agent you apply, all teeth have a maximum level beyond which they will not whiten – the most natural effect is when teeth match the whites of the eyes.

Discolouration can be lifted easily, but the greyiness caused by antibiotics takes longer, and enamel hypoplasia needs treating before bleaching. The colour of crowns or white fillings cannot be improved by bleaching, but a dead tooth can now be lightened by putting bleach inside the pulp chamber (the innermost part of the tooth). **COST** Around £600.

## Implants not bridges

If you split or fracture a tooth, an implant may be a superior alternative to a bridge. A titanium screw is put into the bone and a crown is placed on top. The traditional method of filling a gap is to shave down the teeth on either side so a bridge can be bonded to them and the gap filled, but this damages two potentially healthy teeth. An implant, however, causes no damage, and while it may be expensive, it should be permanent.

Be warned that an implant may be a complex process if you've lived with a gap for a long time (bone is very quickly reabsorbed). They've also been shown to have a higher failure rate among smokers because of a reduced blood supply to the upper jaw. **COST** around £3,000 per tooth.

## More natural-looking crowns

The look of a crown is often spoiled by its metal content appearing as a thin black line at the gum margin. When yours needs replacing, ask for the new porcelain-only crowns (called Empress, Procera, Lava, Inceran or Zirconia), which are equally strong, with no black rim.

Another way to avoid discolouration is replacing the metal posts used to hold the crowns in place with glass fibre posts.

**COST** £600 for non-metal crown, £495 for bonded metal, glass fibre post about £80.

## Invisible braces

No longer just for teenagers, braces are increasingly common among 40-somethings. Our bones become denser as we age, so bracing takes longer than it might have done in our teens, but it's a great way to straighten crooked or misshapen teeth without causing any long-term damage.

Advances in technology mean you don't have to have train track braces. Ask about "lingual" appliances, which sit invisibly on the tongue-side of your teeth, or clear "aligners", which look like plastic gumshields and can be taken out for special occasions.

It may be a long haul, and it's not an instant solution like veneers, but you won't sacrifice any healthy teeth and your new smile will be permanent.

**COST** £3,500 for newer systems, £2,500 for old-fashioned train tracks.

Martina Syron is the principal dentist at Millbank Dental Care in London. For more information, see [dentistsw1.co.uk](http://dentistsw1.co.uk), or call (020) 7828 7676.

## CASE HISTORY

### Bonding gave me a new smile



**Sarah Byford, 41, is a lecturer at King's College London. She had her teeth whitened and bonded 18 months ago.**

"I'd missed out on braces as a teenager and hated my smile, so I went to the dentist (Martina) and steeled myself for painful bracing. Instead, I was fitted with a plastic mould and bleached my teeth every night for a few months. Then my

teeth were straightened in one two-hour session of bonding. No pain, but instant improvement – and all for £1,260. I'm thrilled with the result!" **wjh**



BEFORE



AFTER