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# THE SECRETS BEHIND THE SMILE

YOUR CONFIDENCE COMES FROM WITHIN, YES, BUT SOMETIMES IT NEEDS HELP TO SHINE THROUGH. HERE'S A VARIETY OF COSMETIC TREATMENTS TO HELP YOU ACHIEVE A *winning grin*.

by Wayne J. Guglielmo



*The more you smile at others, the more others will smile at you.*

*for*

years, the act of smiling for 25-year-old Dawn Williams\* was an act of courage. Her chipped and discolored front teeth were part of the problem, but the far bigger part was the snaggletooth front crown that a former dentist had left her with. Ill-fitting and hard to miss, it caused her to keep her lips pursed, even when attempting a grin.

Then Williams visited a new practitioner, family and cosmetic dentist Jeffrey Wechsler, D.D.S., in Mahwah. Wechsler replaced his patient's unsightly crown with a ceramic one. He also placed a set of ceramic veneers — the ultrathin, tooth-colored shells used to cover the front surface of problematic teeth — on her chipped and discolored front teeth.

"The makeover changed Dawn's life," Wechsler says. "She's smiling, has a new job, and is doing great." He adds, "You restore someone's smile, and that person's whole persona just changes."

Porcelain veneers and ceramic crowns are not the only means of improving your smile and perhaps boosting your confidence in the process. Cosmetic and restorative dentists offer other treatments, ranging from simple teeth whitening, to dental implants (a procedure that has revolutionized modern dentistry), to facial injectables.

HERE ARE SOME OF THE MOST POPULAR PROCEDURES:

**TEETH WHITENING.** You do not need to visit a dentist to whiten your teeth, given the number of over-the-counter products available. But if your

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“You restore someone’s smile, and that person’s whole persona just changes.” – Jeffrey Wechsler, D.D.S.

current color presents problems — brown-tinted teeth are the hardest to whiten, yellow-tinted the easiest — you might require professional assistance. “When we do office whitening, the peroxides are of a much higher concentration because we can control them,” says Wechsler, who offers the Zoom! Chairside Whitening System. Even whitening overseen by a professional, however, may not have much of an effect on teeth stained by the antibiotic tetracycline. Such teeth often require more assertive measures, such as bonding, porcelain veneers, or crowns.

**BONDING.** This treatment for restoring discolored, spotted, chipped, or cracked teeth — or improving the appearance of teeth that have some minor misalignment — involves the application of a composite resin material to the back and front of one or more teeth. Today’s bonding material is stronger, more polishable, easier to color match, and more lifelike than treatments of the past. But there are drawbacks: Because resins tend to absorb water, they can stain over time. Bonding materials also chip more easily than porcelain, and thus may need to be refreshed, repaired, or replaced more frequently.

**PORCELAIN VENEERS.** Their superior strength, resistance to staining, long-lasting luster, and natural appearance make this cosmetic treatment option a good long-term investment. Unlike bonding, preparing teeth for veneers requires the dentist to remove part of the tooth’s structure — a minimum 1/100 of an inch. Assuming your underlying tooth structures hold, porcelain veneers will too.

**FULL COVERAGE.** If your underlying tooth structure is weak due to decay, repeated fillings, or from unhealthy habits like grinding or clenching, your cosmetic dentist is likely to recommend capping or crowning. Unlike yesterday’s ceramic-fused-to-metal crowns,

many of today’s crowns are entirely ceramic, which creates a more translucent and natural look when covering front teeth.

Beyond aesthetics, a skilled dentist will also take into account your bite and jaw alignment, especially when placing multiple crowns. “When I teach residents, I don’t necessarily have to stand over them if they’re doing a single crown,” says Louis A. DiPede, D.M.D., an assistant professor in the Department of Restorative Dentistry at New Jersey Dental School, University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey. “But a complete mouth rehabilitation is a lot more than just 28 single crowns.” To place or replace multiple crowns, DiPede first determines whether the current position of a patient’s teeth is the correct one. “Over time, teeth can drift or wear down,” he says. “They may also have been crowned by someone in the past who did it in the wrong position.” Repeating the error, DiPede cautions, will only increase the chances of joint, nerve, muscle, and other problems later on.

**DENTAL IMPLANTS.** Until fairly recently, if you wanted to have a missing tooth replaced, you had one option: a bridge. Cosmetically, the procedure worked well enough, but it came at the expense of the two healthy adjacent teeth, which had to be shaved and capped to secure the connecting dummy tooth. With the advent of implants, a dentist trained in the procedure surgically implants a titanium screw into the jaw bone. For this procedure, the thickness and quality of the bone are crucial. New dental CT scans can help to make this determination. These days, the portion of the implant that protrudes

from the gum and holds the crown into place (the abutment) is often made from tooth-colored ceramic, not metal. That way, if there’s some recession of the gums over time, the cosmetic effect is maintained.

**LASERS.** Dentists use lasers for tissue sculpting. “For example, if a patient has a high lip line and her tissue is scalloped at different levels on each tooth, a dentist can make it more even so one tooth does not look longer,” says Jay Schuster, D.D.S., of Metro Dental Associates in Morristown. “With a laser you don’t have any shrinkage and you get instant cauterization, so there’s no bleeding.”

**FACIAL INJECTABLES.** Some dentists are receiving special training in the administration of neurotoxins (like Botox) to relax muscles and facial fillers that restore volume by filling in lines. “You could get veneers to improve your teeth, but if you have smile lines or if your lips are too flat, your result may not be the best it could be,” explains Bruce G. Freund, D.D.S., of the New Jersey Center for Aesthetic Enhancement in Englewood Cliffs. Dentists are specially suited for administering facial injectables since they perform oral injections regularly. “They are highly trained in the anatomy of the face,” he explains. “For example, a dentist understands facial proportions and how they relate to the teeth. But make sure your dentist is well trained in the procedures you want performed.”

Most of these cosmetic procedures assume your teeth have developed normally. If they have not, it’s crucial to see an orthodontist before proceeding with any restorative treatment. Eric Sacks, D.M.D., an orthodontist in Livingston, explains: “The orthodontist is really creating the framework and the foundation for the restorative dentist to build a beautiful home on.” \*



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