

Showing Teeth

Modern Cosmetic Dentistry Offers Gruesome Grinners a Perfect Smile

By Daniel Ahn

Most people can relate to the embarrassment of having imperfect teeth. They hide their not-so-pearly whites behind a sheepish, lips-only grin or mask those crooked incisors by displaying only their "best" teeth when smiling. In some cases, they won't even smile at all.

Now there's no reason to hide those contorted bicuspid and misshapen molars, thanks to advances in the field of cosmetic dentistry. And those who perform the procedures, as well as those who undergo it, can see the changes almost instantaneously - physically and psychologically.

"Some of [my patients] are pretty outgoing, but there's always something that's holding them back," says dentist Ramin Tabib. "And when they see the impact of that change, they burst out of their cocoon and a latent personality emerges."

Oral reconstruction will always be a private and sensitive issue, and it is important to find the qualified dentist right for you.

"Look for honesty, and integrity - who referred you to this dentist, how many years have they been doing it, is the dentist doing it for money or do they really want to see a change in smile and attitude after the work is done?" says Denise Estafan, director of aesthetics at the department of general dentistry at New York University Medical Center. "After that, ask questions: Can we see before-and-after

pictures? Go on the Internet and be aware of the different procedures available. Ask if your gums are good for the procedure or not. Quite a lot of homework has to be done even before you go."

Tabib says it is not an exact process. "A lot of patients make their decision based on price, but sheer talent is something that is quite overlooked," he says.

It is also something that is quite difficult to measure for the average patient, he admits. "It's something you really can't [gauge], but take a look at the visual presentations, such as



Say Cheese! Some like an Oscar smile.

before-and-after pictures. And a good educational background is helpful too."

So now you've found a suitable dentist and you're ready for a smile makeover. How much of that snaggletooth smile can they fix?

"We treat everything, including crooked teeth, overlapping teeth, mismatched colors of teeth, gummy smiles or if someone just wants a brighter smile," Tabib says. "We can use several different methods to correct these problems. For

example, we do laser gum contouring, which levels the gums if one side is too high in relation to the mirror-image side. We also use porcelain veneers, which are porcelain shells that are applied to the outside surface of the tooth."

Veneers have become much more advanced. Though inherently brittle, these thin shells become strong and durable when they are attached to teeth. They are often used to improve the appearance of chipped, discolored and misaligned teeth.

"The improvement in the materials used in veneers is very noticeable - improvements in the shade to make it look like natural tooth color, translucency at the incisor edges, a natural look to characterize the tooth," Estafan says. "We're seeing quite a lot of laminated veneers lately, as well as whitening the teeth and interdisciplinary work with orthodontists and periodontists to really get a well-rounded smile."

But looking beautiful comes at a price, and it can be substantial, depending on the procedure. "There is a huge price range in cosmetic dentistry," Tabib says. "You can start with a simple bleaching, which is \$800, and you can get more complicated cases that go as far as \$20,000." Some would call that a reasonable price for the perfect smile. ■

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