



The perfect summer smile

Cosmetic dentistry is giving people new reasons to show off their pearly whites. **JULIA NEKICH** reports on the latest techniques.

Gone are the days when achieving a great smile took years of treatment. Thanks to improvements in dental technology, many cosmetic imperfections – gaps, uneven gum lines and discolouration – can be repaired in the dentist's chair in as little as an hour.

"There are two types of cosmetic results dentists look for," says Dr Derek Lewis, a dentist and chairman of the Australian Dental Association's Oral Health Committee. "One is the conversational smile – fine for everyday life, but if you look at the teeth under a microscope, you can pick out flaws. Then there's the Hollywood smile, which looks great even when examined closely. It all comes back to what you want."

COSMETIC BONDING

In most cases, uneven teeth or gaps can be fixed with two types of cosmetic bonding. The first type is composite-resin bonding, a putty-like plastic applied to gaps and uneven areas. "This is instant, requires no drilling or injections, the teeth don't need to be prepared, and it looks quite good," says Dr Lewis. This won't break the bank

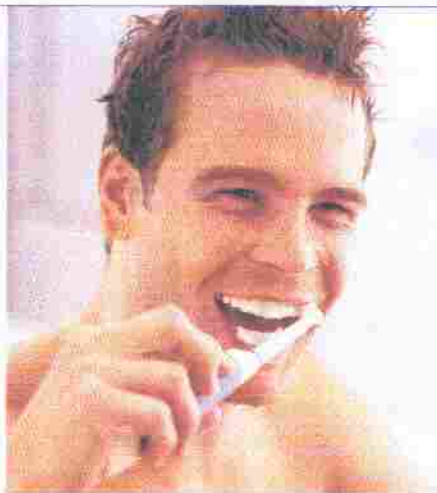
(it's around \$400 to fill a simple gap), but results last only around seven years.

Longer term results can be achieved with porcelain veneers. Porcelain is harder, shines brilliantly and can last for more than 15 years. However, porcelain is double the price and teeth need to be prepared and reshaped beforehand. You also need to allow 10 days for fitting as they are made in a laboratory.

Sydney schoolteacher Helen Karabitsios opted for porcelain veneers on her two front teeth – one of which was chipped and the other knocked in an accident. Six years on, she still loves the results. "They feel very much like my own teeth," she says. "The only difference is that they feel a little more solid."

UNEVEN GUM LINES

According to Dr Lewis, fixing uneven gum lines is quicker than orthodontics, but may require minor surgery. "Gum lines can often be affected by incorrect brushing. Scraping the teeth as though you're cleaning army boots can wear away the enamel near the gums. If your teeth are yellowing near the gum lines, this is a sign that you can be brushing too hard," he says.



WHITENING

Whitening can be carried out in a number of ways, from over-the-counter kits to in-the-chair procedures. The most common over-the-counter kits are whitening 'strips' designed to be worn on teeth for about 30 minutes and mouth trays filled with a bleaching gel that fit onto teeth.

"Over-the-counter kits contain such small concentrations of peroxide that there is unlikely to be any great benefit," warns Dr Lewis. "Peroxide also breaks down quickly when mixed with saliva. If the mouth guards don't fit well, saliva gets into them and washes the peroxide away."

Kits with custom-designed mouth trays and higher concentrations of peroxide are provided by dentists. They start from around \$300 and are used daily for up to three weeks. Results last between one and three years.

Some patients experience a dull ache associated with the take-home kits. "I wore the mouth trays and gel overnight, but it was so painful I only did it twice," says Sydney banker Betty Mojanovska. "The pain lasted the whole of the next day, even when I didn't wear the mould."

Dr Lewis says short-term tooth

sensitivity can happen. "Make sure your bleaching gel isn't too concentrated – 16–20 per cent is too high. And take it slow. If using an overnight bleaching kit, start off by wearing the mouth guards for half an hour and gradually increase the time you wear them," he advises.

After having porcelain veneers fitted, Karabitsios decided whitening was the logical next step and opted for a take-home kit from the dentist. "I did it six years ago, and only re-whitened my teeth last year, so the results lasted four years. An advantage is that I can wear more lipstick colours. Previously some shades made my teeth look darker."

If you don't want to fiddle with trays, opt for a one-hour procedure at the dentist. Two application techniques are available costing upwards of \$1,000. The first is a strong bleaching gel applied to teeth which is activated with a bright light and supplemented with a take-home kit for best results.

The second is laser bleaching, which involves a bleaching solution applied to teeth and 'painted' over with a laser. "It's said to be permanent, but has only been on the market for five years so we're yet to see if the claims are true," says Dr Lewis. "The real advantage of laser bleaching is that you can selectively bleach teeth, whitening just a couple if needed." ☺

For more information about the above procedures, or to find a dentist in your area, contact the Australian Dental Association on (02) 9906 4412, or visit www.ada.org.au

** This information is general in nature. Please seek advice from your dentist before undertaking any cosmetic dentistry.*