

# Blinded by the white



by David M. Kaffey, DDS

Last month in "Blinded by the White part I", I discussed some critical aspects of cosmetic dentistry including how to decide if you want to make improvements to your smile, how to go about choosing the right dentist and the "what" and "who" of cosmetic dentistry. This month, let's talk about how exactly cosmetic dentists create that five star, Hollywood smile that you want?

One of the first things that your dentist needs to determine before they can give you a "star" smile is why you want to change your smile in the first place. It's very important to have a discussion with your dentist concerning your wants, needs and expectations. This initial discussion helps you and your dentist discover what it is you truly want to accomplish and if what you want to change will give you a result that excites you.

People seek cosmetic dentistry for a variety of reasons. Some people simply want to look younger. For those people, cosmetic dentistry is like a "dental facelift" that can quickly reverse the natural aging process of the teeth and enhance the appearance of the face. Other people seek cosmetic dentistry because they have had unattractive teeth their entire lives. An unattractive smile can have a dramatic impact on one's emotional well being, self-esteem, and confidence. A smile is more than just a smile. It's a significant component of our mental health. People who are embarrassed because of their teeth often tend to be shy, introverted and

avoid social situations. This introverted behavior can be part of low self-esteem, lack of confidence and self-doubt that has a dramatic and negative impact on their personal and professional lives.

A smile isn't just about our teeth, it is about who we are, how we feel, and how we want the world to see us. Being "blinded by the white" is more about what is inside than outside. So how do cosmetic dentists create five star, Hollywood smiles? There a plethora of cosmetic procedures we can use to improve smiles. For our purposes, I will focus on three of the most common and most popular- teeth whitening, porcelain veneers, and Invisalign® ("invisible braces").

## Got White Teeth?

According to the American Dental Association, tooth whitening was the number one patient concern in 2006. The recent explosion in popularity of the various tooth-whitening methods has led to sales of over-the-counter tooth whitening products totaling over \$300 million in 2005! This tremendous growth has fueled

an industry that has products and procedures that range from over the counter whitening toothpastes and rinses to stick-on strips to professionally administered systems. This array of choices can certainly make one's head spin when deciding what is best for you.

When it comes to tooth whitening, as with all cosmetic procedures, it is very important to understand what your expectations are and to realize where you are starting. People who have yellowish teeth tend to see the greatest whitening results. Those who have grayish or brownish teeth will have a more difficult time whitening their teeth. Often times additional cosmetic procedures are needed.

## The effectiveness of any tooth whitening method is directly related to the following:

1. How strong is the whitening agent?
2. How long is the whitening agent in contact with the teeth?

For this reason, the whitening toothpastes and rinses tend to be the least effective;



they have the lowest concentration of whitening agent. Other methods, such as tooth-whitening strips, have shown better results for some people as they have increased concentrations of a whitening agent and are in contact with the teeth longer, from 30 to 60 minutes. It is important to remember when using whitening strips that the best results are achieved if your teeth are moderately white to begin with and straight so that the strips can be applied to all teeth evenly. Again, make sure you have realistic expectations and follow the manufacturer's instructions.

For the best results, most people will need the help of a dentist. After a thorough exam, the dentist can advise you which method will give you the best results. Many dentists use two professional procedures. The first uses custom-made take home whitening trays. This is the most popular method and provides excellent results for most people. After molds of your teeth are taken, comfortable custom fitted plastic trays are made. A whitening gel is placed in the trays. Then you place them on your teeth and wear them for 30 minutes to overnight, depending on what your dentist recommends. Most people will begin to see results in two to five days with maximum whiteness achieved from one to four weeks. The second method includes in-office whitening. Depending on the system used, a light source may or may not be used. All in-office systems take one to two appointments of approximately 60 to 90 minutes each. You can expect to see noticeably whiter teeth after the first session.

It's important to note that both over the counter and professional tooth whitening methods are safe when used as directed but they can have some minor side effects. The most common side effect is temporary discomfort or sensitivity. Should this occur, it is recommended that you stop using the product and consult with your dentist. Additionally, no tooth whitening method is permanent and the results can last from eight to twelve months, depending on what you eat and drink. Notably, coffee, red wine, tea, and nicotine will reduce the whitening effects. In order to maintain the whiteness you desire, you will need to re-whiten your teeth periodically.

### Got Veneers?

Porcelain veneers are custom-made porcelain shells that the dentist places over the fronts of the teeth to enhance their appearance or to repair damage. Veneers can dramatically change a person's smile and help improve their self-confidence. Veneers are what give many Hollywood movie stars, celebrities, and music superstars that dazzling smile we see on the silver screen or stage.

Veneers can be used to improve a wide variety of cosmetic dental problems. They can whiten stained or discolored teeth, close gaps between teeth, "correct" a crooked smile without the need for braces, repair chips and imperfections, and create a more attractive or youthful looking smile. The painless procedure usually involves removing only a very thin amount of the outermost layer of the tooth, called the enamel. The dentist then takes molds (impressions) of the mouth. Temporary veneers are then placed

for the patient to wear while the permanent veneers are being made. These temporary veneers give you the chance to preview what your final veneers will look like and to ensure you are happy with your new smile. Shannon Miller shows off her veneers.

Once the veneers are in place, they are extremely strong, durable, and natural looking. More people have veneers than you think. All you see is that beautiful perfect smile.

### Got Invisible Braces?

The latest Buzz in the world of Cosmetic Dentistry is the use of 3D computer imaging software. This amazing technology is being used in many areas of dentistry, including braces. They are not actually "braces", but nearly invisible braces called Invisalign®. These are an amazingly successful system that creates straight, even teeth in about four to thirteen months without the need to wear metal wires or brackets on your teeth. Created for adults who wanted a more attractive smile without the look or inconveniences of traditional braces, Invisalign® provides a fantastic alternative. After a trained and certified dentist determines what you want to change and correct in your smile, Invisalign® uses advanced computer technology to translate the dentist's treatment instructions into a sequence of precisely customized aligners. You then wear each set of aligner for about two weeks, moving your teeth gradually and painlessly, until the desired result is achieved. Because there are no metal parts, Invisalign® is comfortable. The aligners are removable so you can brush, floss, and enjoy your favorite foods without concern. When you're finished, you simply pop the aligners back in and your treatment continues.

In conclusion, these are three of the most popular, effective, and predictable ways that dentists "Blind You by the White!" Tooth whitening, porcelain veneers, and Invisalign® are just a few of the procedures dentists can use to give you that five star, Hollywood Smile you always wanted. Now that you know our "insider secrets", you will be better prepared to ask questions, gather information and find out what it will take to "Blind You by the White!"



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