

# What Are My Cosmetic Options?

**T**oday, healthy teeth and gums are not all you can expect from dental offices. The following cosmetic procedures are commonly offered.

## Whitening

Teeth naturally become darker with age. Food and drink can also affect tooth color. Professional cleanings help keep teeth white, but a safe bleaching process works even better to remove stains.

Chairside bleaching is done in the dental office and takes about 30 to 60 minutes. An oxidizing agent is painted onto the teeth and a special light is used at five minute intervals to help activate the agent. Another option, nightguard bleaching, is done at home using a custom-made mouthguard and bleaching gel the dentist provides. In addition, some toothpastes formulated to remove stains also may be effective.

Whiteners may not brighten teeth that have a yellow, brown or gray hue. Tooth-colored fillings also cannot be whitened. Patients with gum recession and certain dental conditions may not be good candidates for nightguard bleaching. In addition, whitening processes are not recommended for habitual tobacco and alcohol users.

## Orthodontics

Adults and children with crooked teeth, crowded teeth and bite prob-

lems can take advantage of braces. The treatment creates pressure that shift teeth and jaws into new posi-



tions. Since crooked teeth can be hard to clean, braces can also decrease the chance of gum disease to occurring.

Braces come in several styles, and treatments can be as short as 20 months.

## Bonding and Veneers

Bonding is a technique that enhances teeth without braces or surgery. The method rebuilds small surface areas of chipped, cracked, discolored or slightly crooked teeth by covering them with a plastic resin. The procedure is painless and usually takes only one office visit.

Other options for less-than-perfect teeth are laminates or veneers. The procedure allows thin shells to be slipped over the front of the teeth. The custom-made covers are actually an impression of the natural teeth that have been slightly shaped by the dentist. The veneers are cemented in place and usually require just two office visits. The process usually does not result in discomfort.

## Restorations

Cavities form after plaque bacteria use sugar and starch to break down enamel. Left untreated, cavities become larger and can cause several painful problems. Dental restorations, known as fillings, are used to prevent tooth decay from worsening.

Amalgam fillings are a safe, affordable and durable material used to restore teeth that have cavities. Amalgam contains a mixture of metals such as silver, copper and tin. A small amount of mercury chemically binds these components into a hard, stable yet safe substance that has been used for more than 150 years to help millions of Americans.

Although mercury is used in the

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OPTIONS from 9


process, the U.S. Public Health Service, Food and Drug Administration, National Institutes of Health Technology Assessment Conference and the National Institutes of Dental Research have stated that there is no health reason not to use amalgam, except in the extremely rare case of the patient who is allergic to a component of amalgam. However, in 150 years of use, dental literature has documented only 100 cases of allergic reactions to amalgam.

## Implants

Missing teeth can be replaced with predictable results using fixed bridges or dental implants.

## Gum Lifts

Excessive or uneven gums can be corrected with cosmetic surgery, a gum lift, resulting in a more even, pleasing smile.

These and other cosmetic procedures are available. Talk to your Florida Dental Association (FDA) dentist about what your cosmetic options are and where they fit into your overall oral-health plan. 

Sources include the Web sites of the FDA, American Dental Association and the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry.

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