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# Flash That Smile!

BY GEORGE A. MURRELL, D.D.S.



It's never too late to give yourself a smile you can be proud of. No matter how bad your teeth look, there's still hope—thanks to a revolutionary combination of new and old dental techniques known as cosmetic dentistry, or “dental esthetics.”

Because of the explosive growth of cosmetic dentistry during the last five years, adults now can choose between several different methods of getting the smile they've always wanted. Cosmetic dentistry is a catch-all term for a number of increasingly popular dental procedures that can turn even the most unsightly mouth into a work of art.

The most popular method is tooth bonding, where a porcelain-like resin material is applied directly to the teeth. It is effective for relatively minor problems such as filling spaces between the teeth, changing the shape of a tooth or increasing its size. Because it's often less expensive and the results are immediate, some people are choosing to have cosmetic bonding or porcelain crowns instead of

orthodontics. This can be a serious mistake; bonding crooked teeth for purely cosmetic reasons does nothing to correct serious structural problems which could lead to tooth loss. Often a combination of cosmetic dentistry, orthodontics and/or surgery may be the best way to more permanently improve your smile.

You may have seen examples of the dramatic results cosmetic dentistry can give people who have seemingly hopeless dental problems. Dental esthetics can give beautiful new smiles to car accident victims, people with birth defects and older people whose teeth have been devastated by a lifetime of neglect. And with those new smiles comes an improved self-image that can revolutionize the lives of some patients.

But cosmetic dentistry isn't just for people with severe problems. Maybe you had braces as a teenager and didn't wear your retainer very diligently after your bands came off. And now, a couple of

your teeth have shifted out of line. Worry no more because a surprisingly inexpensive combination of orthodontics and cosmetic dentistry could bring you a smile as beautiful as the day your braces came off—in just a few months.

Perhaps your teeth are stained because you're a smoker or heavy coffee drinker, or because of medications such as tetracycline. That relatively simple problem often can be corrected by a process known as “bleaching” in just a few visits to your dentist.

“Cosmetic dentistry can help anybody who thinks his or her smile could be better. It can even help those who don't realize that their smile is the major detractor from their appearance,” says Ronald E. Goldstein, D.D.S., author of *Change Your Smile*—perhaps the best book available on the subject of cosmetic dentistry and adult orthodontics.

“People have become more body conscious—accepting aerobics as a way of life, changing their eating habits to stay healthy. One thing they may be missing is their smile, which could be shortchanging their total appearance.”

The life expectancy of cosmetic bonding is approximately three to eight years, depending on the skill of the dentist and the care the patient gives to her new smile. A newer, more expensive technique called porcelain laminates may last even longer, however it's difficult to estimate porcelain laminates' life span because the technique has only been widely used for a few years.

Dr. Goldstein lists four basic problems that can be treated easily by cosmetic dentistry: chipped or fractured teeth, discolored teeth, spaced teeth and crooked

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...in sources are animal products such as meat, poultry, eggs, fish and cheese. A small amount of these go a long way toward meeting your protein and fat requirements. Beans and legumes, such as split peas and lentils, are considered low-quality (incomplete) proteins. Yet eating them with grain gives you a protein intake similar to that of animal products, at a lower cost, and with a boost in fiber content.

3) Take it easy on fat. Whenever possible, avoid adding fat calories; they're already present in much of the food that you eat. Rely on natural additives such as spices and herbs instead of sauces, butter or gravy for flavor enhancement.

### THE DRESSED-UP PLATE

Healthful, low-calorie selections like grains don't have the visual appeal of most of their higher-calorie counterparts. But dressing them up can make them just as desirable. By adding a flourish of color—tomato wedges, green pepper strips, radish roses, carrot curls, melon slices and orange sections—you'll spruce up any dish.

Keep these tips in mind when you sit down to dinner this Thanksgiving. And don't forget to refer to them during the upcoming tempting holiday season.

## Beauty

**Bonding** (continued from page 38) fronted with additional stresses, early wear because of grinding is becoming more common.

Dentists who use general anesthetics cater to "dental phobics" and people who aren't willing to devote the necessary time to renovating their smile through traditional methods. Their patients range from working mothers to entertainers. But the "one-stop" procedure can be expensive, ranging from a minimum of \$500 to \$15,000 depending on how much work is required. It's also important to point out that there are risks of serious complications—even death—any time a patient is put under general anesthesia.

Because cosmetic dentistry has only become widely practiced in the last five years, many dentists are still relative novices in the field. So it's important to find a dentist who's experienced in all aspects of dental esthetics, or one who's willing to recommend a good dentist skilled in a particular technique, so he or she can help you decide which procedures are appropriate for your individual needs. It's also vital to take an honest look at your smile, determine how you want it

improved and then discuss the options available with your dentist. You should then decide how much money you're willing to spend and how much time you're willing to commit to your new smile.

The best thing about cosmetic dentistry is that when patients come into the office, they are afraid to smile. But when they leave, they're so surprised and delighted that they can smile again. It really helps their self-confidence. ■

### Braces

 (continued from page 38)

...rion of the two, the misalignment can have a devastating effect on your teeth, roots and jaw. The resulting imbalance causes undue stress and wear, which can lead to tooth loss.

With orthodontics, your upper and lower teeth and jaws can be aligned so the force of your bite is properly distributed to the roots of your teeth. Proper alignment also means that dental hygiene—another factor in tooth survival—is easier, because it's simpler to clean straight teeth.

### ORTHODONTIC TREATMENT

Orthodontic problems fall into two basic categories—dental and skeletal. Dental problems concern tooth-to-tooth relation-

(continued)



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