

What Every Patient Should Know Prior to Proceeding with Cosmetic Dentistry

Your smile is your most important physical attribute. Study after study has demonstrated that people notice a person's smile prior to any other physical attribute. Your smile is more important than your hair color, eye color, size of nose, height and even your weight. A pleasing smile will make you more attractive and approachable.

With your smile so important, it is critical to make sure that you proceed carefully with cosmetic dentistry. We have all seen someone with teeth that look artificial and unnatural. Most times that can look even worse than a slightly imperfect smile. So we invite you to carefully read this report. Hopefully it will help you to decide how best to get a smile you love.

Do you even need to make a change or is your smile ok just the way it is?

There are certain smile imperfections that definitely detract from your appearance and should be corrected. They are:

- A tooth that is a different color than the teeth next to it.
- Teeth that are yellow or discolored. This can be more difficult to judge, but if you think your teeth are too yellow, chances are they could be made lighter.
- Teeth that are too small. Your teeth should longer than they are wide.
- Teeth that follow the shape of your lower lip.
- Showing too much of your gums.
- Gums that are red or inflamed.
- Gums that are not symmetrical.
- Teeth that are crowded or overlapping
- Gaps between your teeth.
- A missing tooth or teeth that shows when you smile.

These smile imperfections are generally always noticed by others and if improved, will enhance your appearance.

Other ways to determine if a change to your smile is indicated are to ask a friend or family member that will be honest (most won't) or to ask a dentist. A dentist is probably best able to help you evaluate your smile. The most effective way to do this is through photographs. A cosmetic dentist should take photographs. Together, you should review the photographs making notes of the things that you notice that you don't like. The dentist may also ask about conditions that vary from ideal and ask if they are a concern for you. This process is helpful in identifying and creating a list of the smile imperfections that are a concern and should be

corrected and also the smile imperfections that do not detract from your appearance, but add character.

You've decided you want to make a change. Now how do you find a dentist?

Choosing a dentist for cosmetic dentistry can be very stressful. These are the recommended strategies.

- Ask your current dentist about improving your smile. He or she may have been taking good care of your teeth for many years and may just be unaware that improving your smile is a concern for you. They may also have the skills to help you with your concerns and they might not. But it's a good place to start.
- Ask a friend, especially one that may have had some cosmetic dentistry.
- Ask someone you meet who has an attractive smile. They might have a great dentist.
- Ask another healthcare provider, especially those involved in cosmetic specialties. Dermatologists and Plastic Surgeons can be especially good sources for a referral to a cosmetic dentist.
- Search the internet or use the yellow pages looking for those who promote cosmetic dentistry. If using this route, you should have at least 3 opinions or consultations. It should be recognized that there is not an official cosmetic dentistry specialty. So hopefully, those that advertise this service have advanced training in cosmetic dentistry.

You've got an appointment for an initial consultation. What questions should you ask?

You should use your gut instincts when selecting a cosmetic dentist. Dentistry especially cosmetic dentistry is a very personal service. The dentist and dental office you select should be someone you can trust and like. However, the dentist needs to be more than just friendly. We're looking for someone that can get the job done right on your most important physical attribute. This is no time to be swayed too much by emotion.

You should strongly consider a 2nd opinion even if the first opinion is from your regular dentist or a trusted referral. Every dentist believes he or she can do a veneer or a crown. The process for making a tooth for a dentist is not difficult. They do it all the time. But cosmetic dentistry is different. It requires more planning, time, and precision than regular dentistry. So while most any dentist should be able to eventually get it right. You don't want too much trial and error. You want it look great, last a long time, and to be predictable.

These questions and observations can help you to get the information you need to make a good decision.

- Ask the front office if the doctor provides cosmetic dentistry. If he or she doesn't know or fumbles, the dentist probably doesn't do a lot of cosmetic dentistry. It could also mean that the dentist needs to hire a better informed receptionist. This shouldn't be the deciding factor, but it's a clue.
- Ask the dental assistant if the doctor does a lot of cosmetic dentistry. Follow the same rules as for the front office. If they both say, "Yes." That's a good sign.
- Look at the dental team's teeth. Do they have pleasing smiles? You might get whatever level of smile perfection that the employees or dentist have. Is that good enough?
- Is the office busy? Cosmetic dentistry takes time. A busy office could mean that they do a very good job and many people are pleased or it might mean that they won't take the proper time for the precision required. Your appointment should not feel rushed even if they are busy.
- Do they take photographs? Photographs are the best way to evaluate cosmetic concerns and outcomes. If they routinely take photographs, you should be able to see some examples of before and after cosmetic dental cases. Do you like those cases? If you see one you don't like, ask about it. There may be a good reason why a compromise was made.
- Ask about the process. It should involve at least these steps for veneers or crowns:
 - a. Initial Consultation
 - b. Examination. This should include:
 - i. Radiographs
 - ii. Photographs-possibly some photo-shop to see what's possible
 - iii. Evaluation of the gums
 - iv. Evaluate bite and jaw joint
 - v. Models or impressions of teeth
 - c. Diagnostic Wax-Up of Models-This allows the dentist to plan in 3-D what's possible on your models and show you without doing anything to your teeth.
 - d. Review of Models
 - e. Consultation with the Lab Technician that will be fabricating your restorations
 - f. Preparation of the Teeth and Placement of Temporary Veneers or Crowns that look very similar to the planned result
 - g. Evaluation of the Temporary Crowns or Veneers to make sure that you can speak, and eat comfortably, that your bite feels comfortable, and that you love the way that they look. More photographs and impressions.
 - h. Delivery or insertion of the final crowns and restorations.
- Ask if orthodontics or braces would make for a better outcome? Most dentists just assume that an adult will not be interested in braces. Maybe you aren't. Even so, you

should know how braces, even for 6, or fewer, months, might allow for an improved result with more conservative treatment.

- Ask if the position of your gums should be changed? Your gums are the frame for your teeth. Oftentimes simple alterations to the shape of the gums are all that is needed to make a good smile great.
- Ask about the lab. The laboratory technician plays a role equal to that of the dentist in cosmetic dentistry. There are even fewer good cosmetic laboratory technicians than cosmetic dentists. The dentist and laboratory technician should work closely together.
- Ask if there is a more conservative way to improve your smile? Once a tooth is treated it will require treatment again. The plan to improve your smile should involve as little dentistry as possible. It will still be expensive and may only be possible by treating many teeth, but you should know if there might other options.

There are no right or wrong answers to these questions, but they will create good dialogue and provide insight into the dentist's personality, attention to detail, and ability to provide you with a great smile.

You're almost there. You've selected a dentist. How can you make sure you love the final result?

With teeth whitening, bonding, and orthodontics the final result will be a little tougher to predict, but hopefully by selecting a great dentist you'll get a great result.

With veneers and crowns it should be fairly easy to make sure you are happy with the final result. How? It's simple. You should really, really like the temporaries. The temporaries should feel comfortable and look fairly close to how you envision the final result. You should expect that the temporaries might feel a little rougher and be splinted together and not quite as lifelike, but otherwise you should really like them. Once you approve of the temporaries, photographs and models are made and the laboratory technician can duplicate those results giving you an even better version of something you know you already like.

Cosmetic dentistry, done well, has the power to change your life. Hopefully this information has provided some insight into the process of selecting a dentist and getting the results you desire.

--Jonathan G. Campbell, DDS

We are a team of dentists in Salt Lake City that provide cosmetic dentistry. You can learn more on our website. www.legacydental.com