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Cosmetic Dentistry

The Perfect Smile

by Noelle Robbins

The age difference between Norma Yaglijian of Oakland and Heidi Jowett, a Montclair resident, spans four decades; yet they share the same promise of a bright future, thanks to a new smile. “I was a child of the depression; we had no money for orthodontics. I always felt self-conscious about my crooked teeth,” says Yaglijian, 85. Jowett, 43, echoes the sentiment. “I didn’t like my teeth. My front teeth were crossed. I never smiled.”



These women recently joined a growing number of Americans seeking more beautiful smiles. American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry survey results show requests for porcelain veneers increased 250 percent between 1996 and 2000; whitening jumped by 300 percent during the same period.

Eric Yabu, D.D.S., of Oakland, reports that 40-to-60-year-old females are typical patients in his practice. He also has younger clients because “orthodontia is the purest form of cosmetic dentistry.” Anne Becker, D.D.S., who has operated a Montclair family dental practice for 25 years, is emphatic about when she’ll perform cosmetic dentistry: “Teeth and gums must be disease-free before any cosmetic dental procedure. The foundation must be healthy.”

Many factors contribute to the perfect smile. “Smile-design principles address size, shape and color of teeth,” says Becker. Even the gums can be recontoured to reduce a gummy smile. Both practices address misaligned, chipped, broken and missing teeth; and both cite the popularity of whitening. “I have one 95 year old who told me, ‘My kids think I’m crazy. But if not now, when?’ ” says Yabu. There is overlap between routine dental care and cosmetic dentistry, but, he says, “the biggest difference is that cosmetic dentistry is often elective.”

Typical cosmetic dentistry procedures vary in time from 20 minutes to three-plus hours in the chair; they can take as little as one or two visits, or be scheduled over the course of several years. Porcelain veneers, implants and crowns enhance appearance, improve function and protect teeth from future decay. Becker and Yabu stress follow-up maintenance. Eliminating sodas, cough drops, red wine and tea can add years to the shine of a new smile.

And of course, regular brushing and flossing are a must. “Don’t invest the money unless you plan to take care of your teeth,” says Becker.

She adds, “Cosmetic dentistry is like art—like sculpting and painting. The goal is a natural smile.” Although a recent survey by the AACD reveals that 99.7 percent of Americans believe a smile is an

important asset—96 percent citing sex appeal; 74 percent a successful career—Yabu says, “Do it for yourself; other people won’t notice.”

Benefits of a perfect smile extend beyond the pearly whites. “I smile a lot more, and laugh a lot more. My teeth are a part of my natural beauty,” says Jowett. Yaglijian encourages cosmetic dentistry at any age. “Getting my teeth done has helped me continue to see myself as a vital person. Rather than dwell on things I can’t do, I focus on what I can do.”

Their message? You’re never too young, or too old, for the perfect smile.

Cosmetic Dentistry Glossary

Bridges and Crowns: Used to replace missing teeth, bridges are fixed dental appliances that are bonded or glued to adjacent teeth, which provide anchor support; crowns cover or cap missing or damaged portions of teeth.

Implants: Replacing a missing tooth, implants involve surgically implanting a titanium rod into bone and attaching a permanent artificial tooth.

Porcelain Veneers: Used to correct crooked teeth, crowded or widely spaced teeth and short or irregularly shaped teeth, these are thin shells of porcelain, in a variety of shades, that are bonded onto the tooth.

Gingival (Gum) Recontouring: A technique to improve “gummy” or “toothy” smiles.

Whitening: A bleaching process to whiten or brighten stained or discolored teeth.

Braces: These devices, for children and adults, straighten and realign teeth to improve bite and appearance.

General Resources

Books

The Perfect Smile: The Complete Guide to Cosmetic Dentistry by Warren Doundoulakis and Warren Strugatch

Change Your Smile by Ronald Goldstein

Billion Dollar Smile: A Complete Guide to Your Extreme Smile Makeover by Bill Dorfman

National Agencies and Web Sites

American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry, www.aacd.com, (800) 543-9220. This site contains a searchable list of member dentists, descriptions of procedures and before-and-after photos.

American Dental Association, www.ada.org, (312) 440-2500. Go here for oral health education, tips on how to choose and communicate with your dentist, and more.

American Association of Orthodontists, www.braces.org, (314) 993-1700. Visit here for the answers to many dental questions, including: Why Straighten Teeth?