

COSMETIC TREATMENT

Q What is cosmetic dentistry?

A Dentistry is no longer just a case of filling and extracting teeth, as it was for many years. Nowadays, many people turn to dentistry as a way of improving their appearance, much as they would use cosmetic surgery or even a new hairstyle. Cosmetic treatments include veneers, crowns, bridges and tooth-coloured fillings.

Q Can I replace my silver fillings with white ones?

A For over 150 years standard fillings have been made out of a silvery-grey material called 'amalgam'. This is still one of the strongest and longest lasting materials available for fillings. However, many people find it unattractive and some are concerned about possible health risks.

There are now alternatives to amalgam fillings. If a tooth needs filling or repairing, white fillings are now replacing many amalgam ones. The new dental materials mean it is much easier to find a perfect match for the shade of a particular tooth. In most cases, it is quite impossible to see that the tooth even has a filling.

Q What is a composite filling?

A Composite filling is resin based and is applied as a putty-like material. This can be moulded to the exact shape of the tooth and is then set using a visible blue light. It can be matched exactly to the shade of your tooth and most are now as strong as amalgam, proving to be a successful alternative.

Q What is a compomer filling?

A Compomer filling material is very much like composite but contains a glass-like material which releases fluoride. It is mixed in the surgery and set with a special light.

Q How much will it cost?

A White fillings on the biting surfaces of back teeth are only available privately and will cost anywhere from £40 upwards. The NHS will allow white fillings on front teeth and on the side surfaces of back teeth. These usually cost around £10 to £15 each.

Q What is 'sticky' or 'adhesive' dentistry?

A Modern techniques now involve sticking fillings to teeth using special dental adhesives. This technique is often called 'adhesive' or 'sticky' dentistry. The area is treated with a solution that roughens the surface of the tooth – much the same as using sandpaper 'keys' the wall ready for painting. The adhesive is applied and the filling is 'bonded' to the tooth. The advantages of this method are that the cavity needs less preparation and in some cases it may not be necessary to numb the tooth first.

Q What are veneers

A Veneers are thin slices of porcelain. These are precisely made to fit over the visible surface of front teeth, very much like a false fingernail. There are also 'composite' veneers and these can be completed in just one visit.

Q Why might I have a veneer?

A Veneers are an ideal way of treating discoloured or unsightly teeth, closing gaps between front teeth, or repairing chips and cracks.

Q What are veneers made of?

A Porcelain veneers are made by a dental technician, using impressions taken by the dentist. The veneers are made in the laboratory and bonded to the tooth to form a strong and natural-looking repair.

Composite veneers can be completed in one visit and involve bonding tooth-

coloured filling material to the front of the tooth. Although these veneers are slightly more prone to staining and have a shorter life, they are easily replaced.

Q Can I use veneers to close the gaps between my front teeth?

A Yes. Again, using either tooth-coloured material or porcelain, the dentist can change the shape or size of the tooth very slightly, closing the gap between the teeth.

Q Will my tooth have to be drilled?

A Veneers usually need very little work on the tooth itself, and in many cases don't even need an anaesthetic.

Q How much will it cost?

A In some cases veneers can be available on the NHS and will cost around £65. However, this type of treatment is usually classed as cosmetic and would therefore only be available privately. Costs will vary from practice to practice, and it is always recommended that you get a written estimate before starting treatment. Private veneers cost from £100 upwards.

Q Are there any other alternatives to silver fillings?

A In some cases, the cavity that needs filling is quite large, but the surrounding tooth is healthy. A composite filling may not be strong enough, but it would seem pointless to remove more of the healthy tooth in order to make a crown. In these cases an inlay may be the answer.

The dentist can make an inlay by preparing the cavity in much the same way as they would for a filling. But instead of putting in a filling, the dentist takes an impression of the tooth. The impression is then sent to the laboratory where the technician makes an 'inlay' using porcelain, resin-material or gold. The dentist then bonds this into place.

Q How much will it cost?

A Inlays are slightly more expensive than fillings. They are quite time-consuming to make and must be made by a highly skilled technician. However, they do offer

a more permanent, strong, natural-looking repair.

Always get an estimate of the cost and discuss all possible treatment options with your dentist before starting treatment.

Q My tooth is badly broken - what can I do?

A When a tooth is badly broken or heavily filled, the dentist may need to crown or 'cap' it to restore its appearance and strength.

Q How does the dentist make a crown?

A The usual procedure for fitting a crown involves shaping the tooth under local anaesthetic and then taking an impression using a rubber-like material. The impression is then sent to the laboratory along with the details of the shade to be used, where the technician makes the crown.

Q What happens to my teeth whilst the crown is being made?

A While your crown is being made, the prepared tooth can be protected with a temporary crown, which is easily removed just before fitting the permanent one. In most cases, the temporary crown is in place for about two weeks later.

Q What are crowns made of?

A There are different types of crown, the most popular being 'white' or tooth coloured. These are usually made entirely of porcelain, which can be quite thin and ideal for the front teeth. They can also be made of porcelain bonded to precious metal, which is much stronger and ideal for back teeth.

Crowns can also be made from metal alloy. Silver metal and gold crowns are suitable for back teeth, where they need to be strong enough to stand up to heavy chewing pressure, but appearance is often not so important. Gold crowns have the advantage of being made very thinly and are often used on teeth that bite together particularly closely.

The latest crowns are made from castable glass. They are very natural looking and are stronger than pure porcelain, but not as strong as porcelain bonded to precious metal.

There are different crowns for different situations and it is always a good idea to discuss the matter with your dentist. Let them guide you in deciding which crown would be best for you.

Q How much will it cost?

A On the NHS, the only crowns available on back teeth (from the canine tooth onwards) are metal ones. Many people prefer to have white or gold crowns for cosmetic reasons, but these are only available privately. Costs for these start from around £100, but vary from practice to practice.

Q Are whitening toothpastes effective?

A There are many commercial toothpastes specially formulated to whiten teeth. They are good at removing any staining on the teeth, but are not strong enough to change the natural shade of the teeth.

Q I have a gap – should I have it filled?

A If a tooth is missing, or needs extracting and the space needs to be filled, there are several ways to fill the gap that is left. In some cases it is important to try to replace any missing teeth in order to balance the way your jaw bites. If you have several missing teeth, the remaining teeth are under more pressure, which can lead to broken fillings or even jaw problems.

Q How can my dentist fill the gap?

A A partial denture is the simplest way of replacing missing teeth. However, some people find dentures uncomfortable and eventually decide to have a bridge made.

Q What is a bridge?

A Bridges are ideal for people who don't like dentures or only have one or two teeth missing. Conventional bridges are made by crowning the teeth on either side of the gap and attaching a false tooth in the middle. These bridges are made of the

same materials and fixed in the same way as crowns.

Q What if I don't want my remaining teeth drilled?

A Adhesive bridges are another way of bridging a gap, and less of the tooth needs removing. These bridges are made up of a false tooth with metal 'wings' on either side. These wings are made to bond to the teeth on either side, with very little drilling of these teeth. The teeth are roughened and the bridge is fitted using a very strong composite resin.

Q What will it cost?

A Crown and bridge work is expensive because of the time, materials and expertise involved. Even crowns and bridges covered by the NHS cost more than most other treatments. It is important to get a written estimate of the costs involved before starting.

Q Can I have teeth screwed in?

A 'Implants' are an alternative to dentures or bridgework, but they are very expensive. Implants are titanium rods, which are surgically placed into the jawbone, leaving parts sticking out through the gum. These act as anchors for fastening dentures or crowns onto.

Q What are precision attachments?

A Precision attachments are fastenings for certain types of metal-based partial dentures and vary according to your personal requirements. There are two different types of attachments, however both serve the same purpose.

Q How do they work?

A The attachments work by using wires, springs or hinges, which in turn allow the denture to move slightly whilst chewing, reducing strain on the surrounding teeth. In some cases the attachment can be used in conjunction with an implant for example. They are virtually invisible in use and therefore can be an advantage over traditional metal clasps.

Q Which attachment will be best for me?

A Your dentist will discuss with you which type of attachment will be best suited to your needs. He will take into account how your teeth come together and forces of chewing.

Q How can my crooked teeth be straightened?

A This is usually done during the teenage years, when the teeth are going through a period of growth. However, many adults also have treatment to straighten their crooked teeth. The procedure can take much longer in adults and is therefore more expensive. Costs can vary from £500 to £3,000 or more. Discuss all the possible treatment options with your dentist before starting.

Q How do I look after my new smile?

To keep your healthy smile, it is important to visit your dentist regularly, clean your teeth regularly and thoroughly, and stick to a healthy diet.

Good dental health begins with you. By following this simple routine, you can keep your mouth clean and healthy:

- Brush your teeth twice a day using fluoride toothpaste.
- Have sugary drinks and snacks less often.
- Use a small to medium size toothbrush.
- Use a toothbrush with soft to medium multi-tufted, round-ended nylon bristles.
- Use a pea-sized amount of toothpaste.
- Use small circular movements to clean your teeth.
- Change your toothbrush regularly.
- Clean between your teeth using dental floss or wood sticks.
- Visit your dentist at least once a year.
- Look out for products with the British Dental Health Foundation logo.