

Here comes the bride ...

... and her teeth are nice and bright!

Planning a wedding? There will be plenty of details that demand your attention. Besides the dress, the flowers and the food, there is one thing that everyone will notice on your special day: your smile. Your dentist can help you make sure it's as radiant as possible.

ACHIEVING A BRIDAL-WHITE SMILE

Professional cleaning. A professional cleaning in a dental office before your wedding can help remove stains that might otherwise make your smile less than bright. If food, beverages or tobacco have caused the discoloration, your smile may benefit from a tooth whitening treatment from your dentist.

Whitening. Whitening (also called bleaching) is a procedure that brightens teeth that are discolored or stained or have darkened in color because of injury.

Whitening can be performed on living teeth or teeth that have had root canal treatment. It may be done entirely in the dental office (a process known as chairside bleaching) or the dentist may dispense a system for you to use at home (home-use bleaching).

Chairside bleaching takes from 30 minutes to one hour per visit. A chemical solution is applied to the teeth to lift out stains. A special light may be used at intervals to help activate the bleaching agent. To complete the process, two to 10 sessions one week apart may be required. It is not uncommon for the teeth to become slightly sensitive temporarily after bleaching treatments.

With home-use bleaching, the dentist creates a custom-fitted mouthguard that holds the bleaching gel. The mouthguard is worn up to two hours daily or at night for a length of time specified by the dentist. The amount of time per evening for which the nightguard is worn and the treatment duration may vary according to your needs and your dentist's recommendations.



OTHER COSMETIC OPTIONS

Bonding. If your teeth are chipped, broken, cracked or badly stained or have slight gaps, ask your dentist about bonding. Bonding is a cosmetic procedure that uses tooth-colored materials that are attached or bonded to the tooth surface. The process can improve unsightly stains from coffee, tea, tobacco or certain medications taken in childhood. Bonding sometimes is used to correct chips or to fill small cavities.

The bonding process involves preparing the tooth surface with an etching solution. The solution allows the bonding material (resin-based composites) to better adhere to the tooth. Resins of various colors are carefully blended to match the color of the existing tooth. The resin is applied, contoured into the proper shape and hardened using a special light or chemical process. The bonded tooth then is smoothed and polished to appear natural. Bonding usually can be completed in one visit.

Veneers. Veneers are thin custom-made shells that are designed to cover the front of the teeth. Made of tooth-colored materials, veneers are used to treat gaps and teeth that are permanently stained, poorly shaped or slightly crooked. Veneers also are used to cover teeth that are chipped, worn or eroded at the gum line.

Enamel shaping. If your front teeth are uneven along the edges, or your canine teeth are too "pointy," your dentist may recommend enamel shaping to improve their natural appearance. Enamel shaping involves contouring tooth enamel to create a smooth line. The process, which often is combined with bonding, usually is quick and comfortable. The results can be seen immediately.

TIP FOR TRAVELING BRIDES

If you are planning a honeymoon outside the United States, make sure you and your fiancé have dental checkups a month or so before you leave. This will lessen the likelihood of having a dental problem while you are enjoying your trip.

If your smile could use a little boost before your big day, talk to your dentist. ■

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