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Dentistry

Simple makeovers improve image with ease

Story and photos by Benjamin S. Fiss, DDS

The quest for self-improvement takes on many forms. Many times, this effort is geared to enhance some aspect of one's appearance. Television shows like *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* have highlighted the possibilities available, helping to make cosmetic makeovers an attainable goal to everyone; it's not reserved only for Hollywood celebrities.

Dramatic, full-body changes featured on these shows, however, can take months to complete. What's more, they cost a small fortune! The general public may desire these total makeovers, but don't have the time or financial resources to pursue them. But, it must be understood that these shows have elevated the public's view as to the role of dentistry in makeovers, as well as the impact that a beautiful smile can make. Simply stated, *without dental changes, there would be no makeover*. Changing one's smile, using straightforward procedures and taking only weeks to complete, can produce dramatic results.

Stains be gone

The most noticeable aspect of a beautiful smile is the color of the teeth. Enhancing tooth color is one of the easiest improvements to create. Surface stains caused by coffee, tea and tobacco can be reduced or eliminated through proper home care and routine dental checkups. In severe cases, increasing the number of cleanings from two to four times per year will help greatly.

Stains caused by cracked teeth—which result from habits like chewing ice, using one's teeth to open bags and biting nails—can be more of an issue. Once the crack becomes substantial, stains will become embedded, emphasizing the damage. At this point, a crown or porcelain veneers may be the only remedy. An immediate improvement can be made via bleaching, either via the take home trays, or through an in-office procedure.

Consider contouring

Many times a patient will have teeth that are very attractive, but are uneven in length or are overlapping. Cosmetic re-contouring usually can be done within an hour and without anesthetic. A model is taken of the patient's mouth and then the doctor can carefully outline where small adjustments would enhance the



The worn, broken down dentition, gummy smile, and undersupported lip contour gives the patient a much older appearance.



A youthful smile returns to the patient after several cosmetic dental procedures.

patient's smile. By simply shortening the length, reducing overlapping or rounding corners to produce a more favorable shape, a dramatic result can be obtained.

The shape, contour, position and quantity of gum tissue can also negatively affect a smile. A high lip line and gummy smile can distort the proportions of the face with respect to tooth length. With the use of cosmetic gum surgery, teeth can be made to look longer, enhancing the patient's face shape and smile.

Problems of tooth spacing can be improved in three ways. First, by *repositioning*: teeth can be moved orthodontically with braces or Invisalign. *Restoring* teeth with crowns or porcelain veneers is another option. The third alternative is *removal* of the teeth followed by implants or bridges. Orthodontics is usually recommended first. Many times, due to time restraints or badly diseased and misshapen teeth, veneers and crowns can be a sufficient alternative.

Simple makeovers often require a combination of treatments to achieve the best results. When someone feels good about his or her smile, self-confidence improves. Charming smiles can open doors and opportunities in all areas of life, both personal and professional. Taking steps to improve one's appearance is an investment in both health and well being, and can be a major boost to one's self esteem. In short, looking good means feeling good! ■

Dr. Fiss' practice is located in downtown Chicago.