

Cosmetic dental options



GERBER DENTAL GROUP
BURLEIGH HEADS

Have you mastered the toothless smile because you are embarrassed with the appearance of your teeth? Have you noticed how people with beautiful teeth are happy to smile and show them off? Your smile is one of the first things people notice about you. It gives you a chance to make a first impression that people remember. If you are embarrassed to smile because your teeth are discoloured, broken or missing, there are a range of options available for you.

Smile makeovers can be as simple as tooth whitening, or as impressive as veneers and crowns. The idea of a smile makeover is to give you the results that you want. The first step to a smile makeover is to assess your teeth and gums and discuss your concerns and your expectations. After your initial visit, you will receive a treatment plan outlining your options, the time frames involved in any treatment and a quote for your investment. Gerber Dental Group also offers Care Credit, an easy to use interest free or extended payment plan option for dental treatment, to help you achieve your results sooner.

Replacing missing teeth

Missing teeth can be particularly noticeable especially when they are toward the front of the mouth. Apart from the functional problems created when teeth are lost, many people are embarrassed by missing teeth and it can have a significant effect on people's social or work life.

Teeth are lost for a variety of reasons and sometimes these reasons can affect the treatment options available to replace them. Your dentist will discuss all the possible options with you and let you know if there are any choices that may not be suitable for you.

There are three main ways of replacing missing teeth:-

1. Implants - an implant is a titanium screw that is placed into the bone to replace the root of the missing tooth. A crown is then placed on the implant to replace the tooth itself. A single unit implant most closely resembles a natural tooth and it is a fixed, permanent option. Single or multiple implants can be placed to replace missing teeth.
2. Bridges - a bridge is a "false" tooth attached to crowns either side. The pieces are joined together and are anchored onto the natural teeth to hold them in place. Bridges are generally made from ceramic or ceramic and metal depending on the number of teeth being replaced. While the bridge gives the cosmetic appearance of natural teeth, it does feel a little different because the teeth are joined together.
3. Dentures-partial dentures are the cheapest option for replacing missing teeth. They can be made from chrome or acrylic and have anything from one to several teeth on them. Partial dentures can be made to fit the upper or lower jaw and the teeth can be made using a range of colours and shapes to match your natural teeth as closely as possible. Partial dentures are removable so they are not ideal for patients wanting a fixed or permanent option.

Undoing stains and discoloration

Teeth can become stained from everyday lifestyle choices such as diet, smoking and alcohol, or some medications can cause discolouration or "spots" on your teeth.

In most cases, surface stains and discolouration can be removed with a professional scale, clean and polish and this is always the first place to start. For tougher stains or to remove the "yellowing" appearance your teeth can get, tooth whitening may be the best option. Tooth whitening can be

done in the surgery using “Zoom”. This is a process where whitening gel is applied to the teeth and activated using a Zoom lamp. The results are often very impressive and make a huge difference to your smile. There is an alternative “take home” kit which allows you to whiten your teeth yourself over a period of 2-3 weeks. The results are usually not as noticeable, however you will get some colour change. Tooth whitening only works on natural tooth structure so in some cases it may be necessary to replace any old fillings in your front teeth after the whitening treatment is completed.

Teeth that have darkened over time due to nerve death, injury or old root treatments cannot be whitened using Zoom. These teeth have become dark from the inside. It is possible to internally bleach these teeth and in some cases this is very successful. In other cases, the only way to improve the colour of the tooth is to place a crown or veneer over it. This is also beneficial because it helps to strengthen the remaining tooth structure.

Tooth whitening and internal bleaching is not suitable for everybody so we need to assess your teeth and gums before we recommend these options for you. We offer a complimentary smile evaluation with one of our hygienists if you would like us to assess your suitability.

Straightening “crooked” or “gappy” teeth

Crowded or gappy teeth are very common and orthodontic treatments are often used to “straighten” the teeth and improve the smile. Once used mostly in children, orthodontic treatments are now becoming increasingly popular for adults as well. Treatment options range from orthopaedic appliances to create space, fixed braces to align the teeth and clear removable Invisalign trays to get tooth movement without the need for brackets/braces. Your dentist will discuss the most suitable options with you and provide you with time frames and costings associated with each treatment choice. The benefit of orthodontics, is that no natural tooth structure needs to be removed so healthy teeth are not being damaged in order to get a beautiful smile.

For patients who want a “quick fix”, orthodontics is probably not suitable because it generally takes several months or even a couple of years to achieve the desired result. Crowns and veneers may be an alternative option which can improve the alignment of the teeth in a much quicker time frame.

Improving the size and shape of your teeth

Many people don't like the size or shape of their teeth. Crowns and veneers can be used to change the size, shape, colour and position of the natural teeth. Crowns also have the added bonus of strengthening and protecting damaged tooth structure and bridges can also be incorporated to replace any missing teeth. Crowns and veneers generally take 2-3 weeks to make, so your entire smile makeover can be complete in less than a month.

Crowns

Crowns are generally made from a ceramic material which can be customised to create the colour and ‘effect’ that you are wanting to achieve. Some patients want “Hollywood white” while others want a more natural looking colour. A crown covers the entire surface of the tooth, so in order to place the crown, some natural tooth structure needs to be removed. Because we are removing some tooth structure, we can alter the size and shape of the crowns we place on top. We can also make small changes to the position of the teeth to close small spaces or reduce overlap or crowding that is present.

Veneers

Veneers are a thin application of material to the front of your teeth that enhance the cosmetic appearance of your smile. The best comparison is to that of a false fingernail. Because we are only placing a veneer or facing over the front surface of the tooth, less natural tooth structure needs to be removed. While this is a benefit, it also means we are limited in the changes we can make to the size, shape and position of the teeth. If significant changes are required, crowns are the best option. Two types of materials can be used to create veneers and both are very different in their appearance and longevity.

1. Composite veneers

Composite resin veneers are a short term cosmetic solution and should not be considered as a long term option. They will stain over a period of time and are prone to cracking or de-bonding. The composite veneers can either be formed directly in the mouth (i.e. they are not sent to a laboratory for construction) or fabricated in the laboratory. Composite resin also tends to feather off at the edges next to the gum and in between the teeth and at those feathered edges it can gradually lose its bond strength to the tooth and start 'leaking'. The primary advantage to composite veneers is the fact that they are less expensive in the short term.

2. Porcelain or ceramic veneers

These are formed by a laboratory technician and are made by melting porcelain powders in a high temperature furnace. Porcelain veneers have significant advantages to composite veneers despite their increased cost.

They are fired in a vacuum furnace, which means that there are no air bubbles in the porcelain after it cools and hardens. This is in distinct contrast to composite veneers which often contain microscopic voids and air bubbles which are not immediately apparent, but which fill up with stains (from coffee, tea, red wine and some foods) and eventually show up as small black dots or fine lines. Secondly, porcelain veneers have a high surface glaze, which cannot be removed with tooth brushing. Composite resin, depending on what type of material is used, does not polish to such a high degree. The other advantage of porcelain is that the surface texture can be made to mimic that of enamel with very slight ridges, lumps and bumps. The polishing procedure for composite resin generally causes a fairly flat surface texture and the surface does not look as much like natural tooth structure as glazed porcelain does.

You have to be aware that a small percentage of porcelain veneers will come unstuck and some will break. If you are contemplating having resin or porcelain veneers you should be prepared to accept an occasional replacement or repair.

Getting rid of the "black" fillings

Black or amalgam fillings are very noticeable when you open your mouth and smile especially if the fillings are quite large. At Gerber Dental Group, we don't use amalgam to restore teeth any more. Amalgam is a time honoured restoration that gives good long term results from a functional point of view. The major problem with amalgam for most people is that it looks grey or black and most of us prefer a more natural tooth coloured appearance. Amalgam does not usually bond to tooth structure and thus allows the long term development of cracks underneath the filling. Quite often the side of the tooth will simply snap off one day when you are eating. Other times the crack will penetrate straight down towards the nerve and cause an occasional pain when you chew crunchy foods like grain bread or muesli. If you have large amalgams on your molars, it is highly likely that you will end up needing crowns or onlays on many or all of these teeth as you get cracks developing with age and with the associated stress fatiguing of the teeth.

Another problem with amalgam in some peoples' minds is the presence of mercury. The mercury present in amalgam is bound up with silver and tin and current research does not support mercury poisoning from amalgam fillings. Minute amounts may be liberated when chewing but the amount of mercury from this source has been reviewed by many leading health authorities and deemed to be substantially below any significant health risk. If you have a personal belief that amalgams are harmful to your health your dentist can happily replace them for you.

We will generally recommend that old amalgam fillings are replaced with ceramic crowns or onlays. This can be done using laboratory fabricated restorations or CERECs which are done in the surgery. You need to be aware that the staining that amalgam can cause in your natural tooth structure can also leach out into the surrounding tooth structure and gum tissue causing it to become slightly grey. When you replace the amalgam with a white restoration, the surrounding tooth can still look a little grey, but we do our best to minimise this where possible.

The “Hollywood smile”

Straight, white and perfect is the Hollywood smile. Many patients come in to the practice with pictures of celebrities and request teeth that “look like these”. We can certainly create them for you, but you may actually be disappointed once they are in your mouth. There are many things that effect the final appearance of your smile—your facial structure, skin colouring, mouth width, gums, lips etc. No matter how perfect the teeth, if they are “in the wrong person” they won’t look good.

To ensure you achieve the result you are looking for, we spend time discussing what you want and we usually also recommend having a “wax up” made. This is a mock example made from plaster and plastic and it gives you an idea of how the final result will appear so can make the changes you want before we even start the treatment.

All our dentists are experienced in cosmetic dental treatments so they can make suggestions to help achieve the final result you want. Your dentist may recommend additional procedures such as gum re-contouring to improve the appearance of veneers, or it may be necessary to replace some old fillings to ensure that tooth whitening is successful. The recommendations that your dentist makes will be based on cosmetic appearance, but also on function, strength and protection. The underlying foundations including the bone and gums need to be healthy otherwise your new beautiful smile will fail.

Cheap cosmetic options

Cosmetic dental treatment isn’t something you should rush into. Talk to your dentist, think about your options, look at the long term implications and make a final decision that you know you can live with. If you are unsure, it might be worth considering a temporary option until you make up your mind.

Be very careful of “cheap” or “quick fix” options. You generally get what you pay for and you need to be wary of cheap materials, cheap laboratory work and cheap treatment choices. It might seem like a good idea at the time, but it could end up costing you a lot more to have the problems fixed if things go wrong down the track. In some cases the damage done is too extensive and the only option is to extract the tooth.

Gone are the days when “doctor knows best”. You need to make informed choices which means you need to be comfortable with your treating dentist, you need to understand the options they are offering you and you need to trust that they have the training, experience and expertise to create the result you are looking for.