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Dressing up your smile before the wedding

By Susan Mittleman

COSMETIC DENTISTRY offers a variety of procedures that are relatively painless, quick and affordable, and increasingly popular with brides and grooms.

On your wedding day, the only thing more noticeable than your gown is your smile. In fact, it's your most arresting feature and what really makes you sparkle from the inside out. Like your gown, you'll be wearing your smile all day. It will be photographed, memorized and idolized, and you should feel comfortable and confident showing it off.

Think about it: If you can tailor your dress, why not tailor your smile? Whiter teeth can complement your white dress.

Today, cosmetic dentistry offers a variety of aesthetic and functional procedures that are relatively painless, quick, easy and affordable. They can be done from a couple of months to a couple of weeks before the big day. Recently, more and more people have been putting a trip to the dentist on their pre-wedding "to do" list.

Demand for teeth-whitening has increased by 308 percent in the past five years, says Eric Nelson of the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry. Whitening can get rid of coffee, cigarette or wine stains, or simply brighten dull teeth. According to

Nelson, it's the most requested and performed cosmetic procedure. It can be accomplished in as little as one visit to the dental office, and once you have it done, the benefits actually can last for years.

"Power-whitening," as it is often called, uses special peroxide solutions with the aid of heat, lasers or other

light sources to activate the chemical process. Whitening can also be done in the privacy of your home with a dentist-supervised system. This method requires wearing a mouth-piece, usually at night, and can take a few weeks.

Over-the-counter products with American Dental Association approval



Atlanta dentist Debra Gray King, who appeared on ABC's *Extreme Makeover*, is at the forefront of the "dental spa" trend. The assistant at left provides patients with massages upon request. It's also possible to watch cable TV and movies during procedures.

PHOTO: PETER BOULDEN, D.M.D./ATLANTA CENTER FOR COSMETIC DENTISTRY; MASSAGE ASSISTANT: SLOANE WARREN

Cosmetic Dentistry Q&A

can also achieve favorable results. However, Nelson advises consulting with a dentist before using such products because certain peroxide solutions can cause tooth sensitivity and irritate gums.

Besides whitening, there are other ways a cosmetic dentist can improve your smile. For example, if you have a large gap between your front teeth, a crooked bite or an old crown that needs to be replaced, porcelain veneers can correct these imperfections. You can replace metallic fillings with newer, tooth-colored inlays, which will keep cavities hidden and make for less reflection in photographs. Bonding and contouring can smooth jagged edges, fill in gaps and lengthen teeth that have been worn down over time.

The goal of cosmetic dentistry is to make teeth look naturally beautiful, without braces, dentures or long and arduous procedures that involve scary instruments and pain. What is required is a skilled dentist with an artistic hand and a proven track record.

Brides, grooms, moms and dads are all candidates for a wedding smile makeover. It can also make a nice gift for members of the bridal party. For some, a day at the dentist can resemble a day at a spa. Many dental offices provide massages, movies, music and even paraffin hand wax treatments along with new dental technology that helps to ease you through the procedures more comfortably.

With all of the attention being paid to other wedding details, don't forget the one that will be remembered most — your smile.

Here's a quick guide to some of the most common cosmetic dental procedures:

Bonding affixes natural tooth-colored resins to the tooth surface to close gaps, chips, cracks or stains.

Cosmetic contouring reshapes teeth to make them straighter or more youthful-looking. The dentist files them down, rounds them off or gets rid of jagged edges.

Crowns are caps or covers that

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Dr. Debra Gray King, D.D.S., is owner and president of the Atlanta Center for Cosmetic Dentistry. She is an innovator in cosmetic dentistry and a fellow of the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry. She teaches other dentists and lectures on aesthetic dentistry around the world.

Q. What are the most common procedures requested by brides and grooms?

A. "Teeth-whitening is becoming more common and popular, as well as porcelain veneers to close gaps to get a beautifully natural smile. Moms and dads and other members of the wedding party are also candidates for smile makeovers for the big day."

Q. How do you calm the fear factor in nervous patients going to the dentist?

A. "We want our patients to not only look gorgeous but enjoy the process. Our office uses new, more effective types of anesthetic and computer-controlled devices to more comfortably numb the teeth than in earlier years. We also provide spa-like amenities to distract you from the procedure and to help you with the psychological discomfort you may associate with visiting a dentist. We offer nitrous oxide gas, DVD movies, music CDs and anti-anxiety medication (when appropriate), along with a heavy dose of good ol' TLC."

Q. What is a scalpel-less cosmetic smile lift?

A. "A lot of time when people age, their teeth get worn down, get shorter and shorter, and can get over-closed, a kind of denture look. We restore that worn-away enamel so you're biting back in that bold position like when you were younger, making your face a little longer with fewer wrinkles. It kind of stretches your face."

Q. If I drink red wine or punch at the wedding reception, is there a quick fix for keeping my teeth from turning purple or gray?

A. "Carry a travel-size toothbrush and whitening toothpaste in your purse. You can also use the brush alone to exfoliate stained lips. Another option is Dental Dots, mini-tooth brushes that adhere to your finger and contain a small amount of toothpaste for quick touchups on the run."

Q. What is the "dental spa" concept?

A. "We make sure our patients are pampered while undergoing procedures ranging from routine cleaning to cosmetic reconstruction. A staff massage therapist performs neck, shoulder and facial massages. Patients receive soothing paraffin hand wax treatments and wide-screen virtual-reality glasses while relaxing in our 'dental zen chair.'"

Q. How can using lipstick make my teeth look whiter?

A. "Hold a piece of white paper next to your mouth and smile. If your teeth appear more yellow, wear red and orange shades to make teeth appear lighter. Purple and pink hues accentuate discoloration. If you fall into the blue-gray range, stick to bright pinks, berry and purple shades. Avoid red and orange, which cast warm undertones and make the cool color of your teeth more obvious."

—Susan Mittleman