

Bright Smiles

On a recent visit to dental expert Dr. Steven Roth of FishmanRoth we discussed many teeth whitening options. I was struck with his charming candor and honesty.

What makes his practice different from other practices? Dr. Roth explained, “We photograph all our patients so that they can see the before and after effects. We ask our clients to look in the mirror and describe their likes or dislikes about their teeth.”

Now true to form, I had a chance to see some of these pictures, and I was astounded by the changes. If the eyes are the windows to the soul, then the smile is the door... “We are judged by our smiles and our teeth. It isn’t just the celebrity in front of the camera, but it’s also the CEO or the woman in middle management.” Our smiles reflect who we are and even our competence, unfair as it may seem.

The majority of patients are women, but increasingly you are seeing more men come in for whitening and veneers. And for the bride to be, it is imperative to have a great smile, especially against a white wedding dress. “Whitening is an introduction to cosmetics” says Dr. Roth. I asked him to take me through the different “levels” of teeth whitening.

First, there is the most affordable option. “At-home” whitening requires the patient to have exact molds made of his/her teeth. A powerful bleaching gel is then worn for about an hour a day for 2 weeks to bleach the teeth. This option is about \$600. The molds are permanent, so maintenance is pretty easy and usually once a year.

Power Bleaching is another option but more expensive—about \$2000. This requires a laser procedure coupled with home bleaching. The reason this is not often the best choice is largely due to the laziness of the client. The results are sporadic, depending on the consistency of usage at home. Laser bleaching takes a little over an hour and is performed in the office.

The most permanent of all whitening options is, of course, cosmetic veneers. This is a very pricey option, and because it is cosmetic, not covered by insurance. A full set can run as high as \$20,000, but the effect is nothing short of spectacular. Other than light maintenance, it is considered permanent in effect. Veneers don’t pick up stains the way regular teeth do.

Now, what if you are getting married and want to do more than just whiten? Dr. Roth recommends giving yourself 3-6 months if you are doing any major surgery such as gum work, lengthening the teeth, or Invisalign (orthodontic work). If there is a snag, you need to give yourself time to recover.

“I had a bride who wanted the works. She wanted veneers and some serious gum work. And she was getting married in 6 weeks.” He was very honest with her and suggested she settle for whitening and save the difficult tasks post honeymoon. “I didn’t want to risk her being sore and irritated on her wedding day.” Dr. Roth concluded that the best and most affordable option for anyone who has relatively non-problematic teeth is still at-home bleaching. He also warns against overprocessing, as it can lead to a bluish cast on the teeth.

What if you don’t have the money to do cosmetic whitening? So, what about all those other options on the market? Do they work? Well, the answer is, yes, for the most part. But unlike laser, it isn’t permanent and requires more maintenance and upkeep. I’ve had a chance to sample a few of these products and here is what I’ve concluded:

CREST WHITE STRIPS are affordable (\$30) but you can't achieve a uniform appearance by a strip. Everyone has a unique shape and unfortunately, the result is often "two-toned". This means that the front teeth are whiter and the teeth behind the canines are still yellow. Basically, they fit only a "balanced" tooth. The only way a gel can work evenly is if a cast is made of the teeth and a mold is taken for an exact match. Strips can't do that. Besides that, they only cover 4 or five teeth.

CREST NIGHT EFFECTS are even more affordable (\$15) but basically have the same disadvantages as the white strips. However, you may sleep with these on and it doesn't take up your time. Nevertheless, it's proven that to get the best effects, you only need one hour a day.

Here are whitening dilemmas to be aware of: Whitening pastes clean only the surface of the teeth. They can't whiten the stains below the surface of the enamel. Night Effects does, however, have a unique strip coating. The strips are water resistant. The coating holds the whitening agent in place, slowly releasing hydrogen peroxide while you sleep. This loosens stain causing buildup.

SIMPLY WHITE is a Colgate product and is the least expensive (\$10). I can't say this worked much. You paint the teeth, but saliva is going to immediately wash the product off.

ZOOM is a bleaching process which lightens discoloration of enamel and dentin. It is easy and fast, using a light process in the office. Stain culprits such as tetracycline, coffee, tea, red wine, cola, and tobacco can be instantly eradicated, depending on the extent of the damage. Light activated whitening gel's active ingredient, also hydrogen peroxide, is broken down and oxygen enters the enamel and dentin. Zoom bleaches colored substances while the structure of the tooth remains unchanged. It takes a little over an hour and the results are phenomenal. Cleaning is recommended before the procedure as are home touch ups.

GO SMILE is another quick fix. I liked this one, actually. They come in a set of 30 and are great quick fixes to put in your purse. They take red wine stains out immediately and come in a little case, so they are fun and discreet. Not only that, but the powerful minty aftertaste takes the place of any breath freshener!

Dr. Roth is available for consultation. Visit FishmanRoth's website at www.smilesny.com.