



The Smile Files

Dreaming of a gorgeous grin? The latest in cosmetic dentistry and orthodontics will have those pearly whites perfect and polished in no time. *Carly Baillie* reports

The ability to put on a happy face may not snag you an Oscar (Julia Roberts' megawatt smile notwithstanding) but, according to a study published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, it may help you succeed in your own right: of 100 women's yearbook pictures examined from 30 years ago, those with the broadest smiles went on to become more organized, mentally focused and achievement-oriented. They also experienced fewer psychological and physical difficulties and were more likely to have gotten and stayed happily married. For immediate gratification, studies have also shown that smiling, even when you don't feel like it, can make some areas of the brain's left hemisphere "the happy zone" by surging with activity, thereby lifting your mood. Still hiding your less-than-pearly whites behind a pout? The latest in whitening lasers, high-tech orthodontics and cosmetic dentistry can help turn that frown around.

The white way

According to the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry, tooth whitening has increased by 300 percent in the past five years. From splurge to steal, white teeth come at any price:

- \$\$\$\$\$ Bonding or veneers: the thin, top layer of the tooth is removed and replaced with porcelain or composite resin (the same material used for tooth-coloured fillings), which gives you a permanent gleaming grin—from \$175 to more than \$1,000 per tooth.
- \$\$\$\$ Laser whitening: hydrogen peroxide or carbamide peroxide is placed on the teeth, then a laser is used to help draw out superficial stains. \$800 - \$1,200 for a full grin.
- \$\$\$ Pro whitening: a tray is made from a mold of the teeth then filled with a whitening agent and worn at home for 30 minutes a day (or overnight) for 7-10 days. \$400 - \$600 for the entire treatment. Touch-ups come cheaper as, once you have the tray, you only need to purchase the bleach solution from your dentist.
- \$\$ Drugstore bleaching kits: while more economical, they can whiten unevenly since the tray isn't fitted to your bite. \$10 - \$50.
- \$ Whitening toothpaste, dental floss and gum: "They're not going to give you the jump in colour," says Toronto Cosmetic Dentist Dr. Joshua Charlat, but they can make a small difference and help maintain whiteness between treatments."

Try: Arm & Hammer Dental Care with Baking Soda, \$2.99; Johnson & Johnson Reach Whitening Floss, \$5.49; or Colgate Dental Gum, \$1.29.

Smile health

- Gum recession causes an exposure of the root of the tooth, leaving the root open to plaque accumulation or cavities. It can develop as a result of overzealous brushing, teeth grinding or clenching. (Also, swishing carbonated beverages, excessively sucking on citrus fruit and swimming in overchlorinated pools can cause decalcification and erosion of tooth structure.)
- Pain or clicking in the jaw, a shifted bite, premature wearing of the teeth and grinding can all result from a dysfunction occurring in the TMJ (temporomandibular joint), which connects the lower jaw to the skull. Bite plates, bite adjustments (leveling teeth so they fit together in a neutral, comfortable position) and surgery can improve or correct the problem.
- Although 35 percent of Canadians brush for 60 minutes a week, only 11 percent devote the same amount of time to flossing—a must in removing plaque, which can build up at the gum line and harden into tartar, eventually attacking the gums and surrounding bone structure, resulting in tooth loss.
- Electric toothbrushes "do a better job of removing plaque and massage the gums, stimulating blood flow," says Dr. Charlat. Try: Braun Oral-B 3D Excel, Conair Interplak or Colgate Actibrush.
- Putting off filling your cavities because you're scared of the drill? The hydrokinetic light laser can cut through tooth enamel, remove old composite (tooth-coloured) fillings and contour soft gum tissue, usually without the need for freezing—although it does make a pulsing noise.