



LIZ DWYER has spent more hours in a dental chair than most. In her endless quest for a perfect smile, she charts the new treatments available in aesthetic dentistry, from A to Zeneers.

smile? Many of us assume straight teeth or bright whites are the Holy Grail of a young, pretty smile, but as my own fiveyear dental odyssey unfolded, I discovered these are just two of the many elements that contribute to an aesthetically pleasing grin. Dr Aisling O'Mahony, who heads up the Restorative Dentistry Unit in St James' Hospital, has dedicated her entire career to rebuilding smiles, from complex cases like cleft palates and craniofacial traumas, to patients who just want a more symmetrical smile. When it comes to cosmetic dentistry, Dr O'Mahony believes many of us have obscure assumptions about our own teeth. "Many patients come to me saying they're considering braces, assuming straighter teeth will give them the smile they're chasing, but braces are often the last thing they need." Unfortunately, there are dentists out there who just see euro signs, when a patient arrives asking for a smile like Kate Middleton's (hers is apparently the most requested), and will advise on a costly, complicated course of treatment, which is unlikely to deliver the results a patient wants. "It's like going to the mechanic - if you don't know your spark plugs from your starter motor, you're never really quite sure if they're just adding on problems to bump up the bill or informing you of genuine glitches that they can recover," warns O'Mahony. If you want to aesthetically improve your smile, she suggests judging it against the following parameters - gums, colour, shape and span. Then decide which areas are really niggling you and weigh up the latest treatment options before committing to a course of action. "You may be surprised at how small a job your dentist actually needs to do, or that there are cheaper alternatives out there to fix most concerns, so it definitely pays to do your homework." With 18 fillings, two implants, two crowns, four root canals, one bout of bonding and eight veneers, I've done most of it for you. So drawing on my endless hours in up to ten various dentist chairs, here is a crash course in dental discourse ...

hat makes the perfect

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GUMS

The size, shape and spacing between gums completely determines how well teeth look, yet most of us don't give them a second thought. Even bright white teeth will look duller and older alongside bad gums. When you smile, ideally you should only be able to see one or two millimetres of gum above the teeth line. The gums should be pink and healthy looking, with arches that follow the same symmetrical pattern from the middle two incisors outwards. If gums are too long, they make teeth look shorter; or if the gum arches follow an inconsistent pattern, teeth can look irregularly shaped and the smile unsymmetrical.

FIXING IT

My upper middle teeth have always looked irregular in length, and I assumed bonding or veneers would be required to match them up. However, Dr O'Mahony pointed out that until I addressed my crooked gum line, the illusion of mismatched lengths would remain. She suggested I have a gum lift to solve the problem, which sounds rather drastic, but in fact turned out to be no more taxing than having a filling. The procedure simply involved a local anaesthetic to the upper gums, and then reshaping with a tiny scalpel and a small laser. It was done in half an hour, and my gums were tender for a day or two afterwards. Once they healed and settled,

the difference a few millimetres made was quite extraordinary. My teeth on the right side, for the first time ever, matched those on the left, they all appeared longer and fuller and thus more youthful (as we age, teeth look shorter) and overall, my smile appeared more symmetrical and uniform. Anyone with healthy gums can have theirs reshaped or scaled back. It's mostly performed on the front of the mouth, but in a wide smile may be done in the premolar region too. Done properly, the new gum position should last permanently.

COST From €250 per tooth.

A recent survey revealed stained teeth could age you by 13 years, but flashing a set of blinding white nashers, à la Joey Essex, can be just as aesthetically off-putting. So what's the perfect pearly shade? One shade up from the whites of your eyes is reportedly the most flattering.

FIXING IT

1997

Unless you have caps, veneers or milk teeth, most smiles will brighten up to ten shades lighter by using a bleaching gel made with hydrogen peroxide. Oral B's dentist and whitening specialist Dr Uchenna Okoye explains that hydrogen peroxide causes a simple chemical reaction when applied to teeth. "Oxygen is released, which disturbs and shifts chromogens from the tooth surface. Chromogens are pigments from foods that adhere to dental enamel, and when they are removed, the tooth's natural pearly colour can shine through again," says Okoye. Unsurprisingly, the darker the food or drink, the more chromogens they contain, and acidic foods and beverages also add fuel to the fire, as they temporarily soften teeth, making it easier for chromogens to infiltrate through and stick to the layers of enamel. But is it safe for teeth to be coated in harsh chemicals? "It's akin to deep cleaning the pores on your skin, and it's no more damaging to your teeth than having a glass of fizzy water," says Okoye. What is damaging is using baking soda-based teeth products. "I'd prefer patients washed their

teeth in tar than use these toothpastes, as they are

abrasive, and mechanically erode away the surface enamel, lessening the tooth's natural defenses and strength."

DIY OR DENTIST?

New laws mean that over-the-counter whitening products sold in Ireland can't contain more than 0.1 per cent hydrogen peroxide. Most dental-clinic systems use 15-35 per cent. Having tried both options and having even used 14 per cent DIY bleaching kits from the US, I honestly believe a one-hour session with your dentist is really the only route to accelerated whitening. You get results fast, without any of the mess and endless hours foaming

Demi Moore before and after dental treatment, which included whitening at the mouth trying to bleach up at home. Dentists can sell patients ten per cent

at the mouth trying to bleach up at home. Dentists can sell patients ten per cent hydrogen peroxide gel with bleaching trays once they've administered the treatment, which are a worthwhile investment for maintaining whiteness between sessions.

COST From €100 for an in-clinic whitening treatment, and from €30 for ten per cent hydrogen peroxide kits.

A recent survey revealed stained teeth could age you by 13 years.

IMAGE BEAUTY

SHAPE As teeth wear and age, they lose their soft edges, becoming more jagged and often chipped. They become shorter and flat around the corners, making your smile look older and often crooked. The ideal length of each tooth, from the tip to the base of the gum, should be ten or eleven millimetres, with a straight edge and slightly rounded corners. For many, the deterioration process is accelerated by grinding, a phenomenon Dr O'Mahony is seeing all too often in younger patients, as the recession bites. Grinding may occur while awake, but often the most damage is done while asleep, so it's difficult to consciously circumvent it.

FIXING IT

As I'm a chronic grinder, my dentist in 2008 prescribed a clumpy, annoying plastic mouth guard to wear at night. I wore it for a week, spat it out mostly while sleeping, and then conveniently lost it. It was then suggested I have Botox injected into the masseter muscle on my jawbone, which isolates the muscle group and prevents involuntary grinding, but as it would



a consultation, it can be completed in one quick visit. My dentist bonded my top four teeth, at a cost of

veneers and bonding to

widen and unify her smile

appears to have had

€300 each, and the results were instantly gratifying; my teeth looked fuller, longer, more uniform, and had a lovely feminine softness to the edges. They also looked whiter, and because the ends now followed the same alignment, my smile looked straighter too. Bonded teeth need more maintenance, with bi-annual polishing, and my dentist was adamant

VENEERS, LUMINEERS AND ZENEERS

After my bonding fiasco, veneers were the only option left available to me to reshape my front teeth. At almost €2,000 each, it took me two years to save up for them, during which time I intensively researched the various types on offer and visited five dentists until I found one I felt

understood me and my attitude to my bad teeth – Dr O'Mahony. In general, veneers are thin files that cover the facial surface of the tooth and are glued onto teeth with a permanent cement-like substance. There are different types on the market, made from various substances. The latest are Zeneers and they're made from zirconia, the substance used in

manmade diamonds. They're as slim as contact lenses and as strong and luminescent as diamonds. The celebrity choice is Lumineers, the thinnest porcelain veneer on the market, which requires minimum teeth prepping and boast a really high shine. Durathin, as the name suggests, are thinner than standard prep-less veneers and are also made by hand in graduated shades, so they look more natural. Traditional porcelain veneers are thicker, so require more tooth filing to look flush against the rest of your smile, but have a documented history of lasting the longest. They all have pros and cons, and ultimately your teeth and your dentist's experiences with the various options will determine which type will work best for you.

My penchant for grinding meant IPS e.max veneers were my best bet, as they boast strength and have a nice lifelike translucency, but they require timely and precise prep work. After two preparation appointments, the underlying teeth were filed down into little posts, so the veneers have something to cling onto. I took a selfie during this process and was horrified at how much tooth was filed down. I looked like an old witch, with

47% of people have untagged or removed a social media photo of themselves because of their smile.

require top-ups every three months at an average of €200 a shot, I declined. In a bid to undo the damage my grinding and age had caused, there were then two options available: bonding or veneers. I ended up paying for both.

BONDING

Bonding is the quickest, least invasive and cheapest option for recontouring teeth, so naturally I chose this first. Older bonding substances were not much different to the material used for white fillings, but typically become discoloured and opaque looking over time. However, newer filler formulas such as e.max offer a beautiful translucency, high shine and tough finish, which if cared for can last up to ten years. The dentist applies the bonding in layers, sculpting the resin with a free hand, rounding off edges, filling in chips, lengthening teeth if necessary, and then hardens it with a high-intensity light. It's remarkably quick, and fairly painless, as it requires minimum preparation - just a light roughening of the underlying tooth. Better still, after

I wear my night brace to prevent grinding and protect the bonding. Alas, this advice fell on deaf ears, and two years later, the cracks literally started to show. The bonding started splitting down the centre and by year end, all remnants of it had sunk off, leaving my teeth looking 100 times worse than the starting point pre-bonding.

COST €200-€300 per tooth.

LIZ'S ADVENTURES IN AESTHETIC DENTISTRY







1 My original teeth, starting to wear down and overlap 2 My teeth post-bonding, whitening and four side veneers to widen my smile 3 The bonding cracked off, leaving my teeth in a worse state, and they needed to be prepped for veneers 4 Four front e.max veneers, hours of pain, and thousands of euro later, and my smile is finally picture perfect.

IMAGE BEAUTY

little stumpy gap teeth, and vowed there and then to treat my smile with the zeal of a hygienist going forward. Between the filing, countless plaster moulds are taken of your mouth so that precise impressions of your to-be veneers can be sent to a laboratory. Here, they're meticulously tweaked and colour matched to best fit your smile. This timely and uncomfortable mould-taking process is being phased out now with the introduction of digital dentistry, where a scanner takes 3D images of your mouth,

Most requested

4 AESTHETIC DENTISTS SHARE THEIR TOP TREATMENTS

MOST REQUESTED AESTHETIC TREATMENT More and more professionals and teens are now looking for ways to straighten their teeth WHAT WE USE Unlike traditional "train track" braces that are worn on the front of teeth, we use Invisalign clear aligners that are removable and invisible, so no one can see them CONTACT David McConville, Suite 5, Quayside Shopping Centre, Sligo, 071 915 0820; sligoanddonegalorthodontics.ie

MOST REQUESTED AESTHETIC TREATMENT Healthy gums and a winning smile WHAT WE USE A combination of gum reshaping, bleaching, porcelain and e.max veneers, as well as all-ceramic crowns to whiten, widen and unify the smile CONTACT Dr Kevin O'Boyle, Burlington Dental Clinic, 16 Burlington Road, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4, 01 668 4357; burlingtondentalclinic.ie

MOST REQUESTED
AESTHETIC TREATMENT
Straighter smiles and wider
span WHAT WE USE Six Month
Braces™, which straighten teeth in
record time, are one of our most
popular procedures, and you can
spread payments out over the year
CONTACT MyDental, 11 Bath Avenue,
Sandymount, Dublin 4, 01 677 3556;
mydental.ie

MOST REQUESTED
AESTHETIC TREATMENTS
Dental implants to replace
missing teeth or to anchor dentures,
bridges or crowns, and clear braces
are very popular WHAT WE USE
Zirconium (the diamond veneer) and
metal-free aesthetic crowns, and
Invisalign braces get great results
CONTACT Smile Store, Tramore
Road Junction, Toher Road, Cork,
021 432 0004; smilestore.ie

but it's only in the rollout phase in Ireland now. The entire veneer process can take months and involve anything up to six dental sessions, which are all very long and tedious, often painful, and it's not the one-hour mouth makeover television shows would lead you to believe.

But the outcome completely vindicated all the procedures, the pain and the whopping price tag. Not only do I have the aesthetic teeth of my fantasies, with perfectly proportioned gum and teeth line, my teeth are now stronger, healthier and will withstand the grinding, which is helped by the new very slight, featherweight gum shield I wear every night.

COST €800-€1,200 per tooth.

Ten to twelve top teeth are exposed in the perfect smile. If you look at celebrities such as Kate Middleton or theryl Cole, you'll notice how wide and

Cheryl Cole, you'll notice how wide and welcoming their span or bite is, and when teeth aren't properly aligned, your entire lower face, including your lips, appear to cave inward. To widen and align the upper teeth, orthodontic work is generally required. "There are so many places out there now offering quick fix braces, or invisible shields, or braces behind the teeth, and we end up having to fix the bites on so many of these patients, as they are totally off," says Dr O'Mahony. "I beseech patients, including my own, to go to an orthodontist if considering any type of realignment. The treatment will cost you the same, but you will get all their experience of jaw alignment and bone structure that a general dentist won't have. You wouldn't go to your GP for an ear

FIXING IT

If your teeth are genuinely crooked or overlapping, braces are the only way to go. However, if you just want a wider, broader smile, veneers, positioned on the back upper teeth, are the answer.

operation, so likewise you should see

a specialist for any type of braces."

BRACES

There are so many new types of brace available, all promising straighter teeth in nanoseconds, that it's important to weight up the options. Irish dentists are inundated with requests for Incognito or Lingual braces, as Kate Middleton reportedly had them on in the run-up to the royal wedding. They look and work in a similar fashion to train tracks, but use a thinner metal and, crucially, are



worn behind the teeth. A very skilled orthodontist should be enlisted to oversee this type of brace, as they require great dexterity to tweak and can take anywhere from a few months to a few years to achieve the desired result. These are ideal for straightening, widening the top row, and bringing more of the back teeth into view.

The Invisalign system involves wearing a series of custom-made clear aligners (or transparent moulds, replaced every few weeks, generally 25 times), which move teeth a little at a time. Barely visible and easy to remove whilst eating or washing teeth, they work best on teeth that need moderate realignment. There is now also the Invisalign i7 system for minor problems, which take even fewer aligners, typically only seven. These are great for simpler cases and will align teeth in the arch, but won't address issues with bites or major overlaps. Six Month BracesTM, which use nickel titanium wires, or transparent ones, can realign front teeth in half a year. These are not advised for those who need to change their bite to any significant degree, but ideal for correcting a few misaligned front teeth, fast.

COST Incognito/Lingual braces, from €5,000; Invisalign, from €4,000; Invisalign i7, from €3,000; Six Month Braces™, from €3,500.

CONTACT Dr Aisling O'Mahony, Seafield Lodge Dental Clinic, Dublin 4, 083 154 3501; seafieldlodgedentalclinic.ie

82 January 2014 www.image.ie