

# it's all white

Beauty Editor Tracey Strange investigates five ways to overcome teeth troubles for a better-looking smile

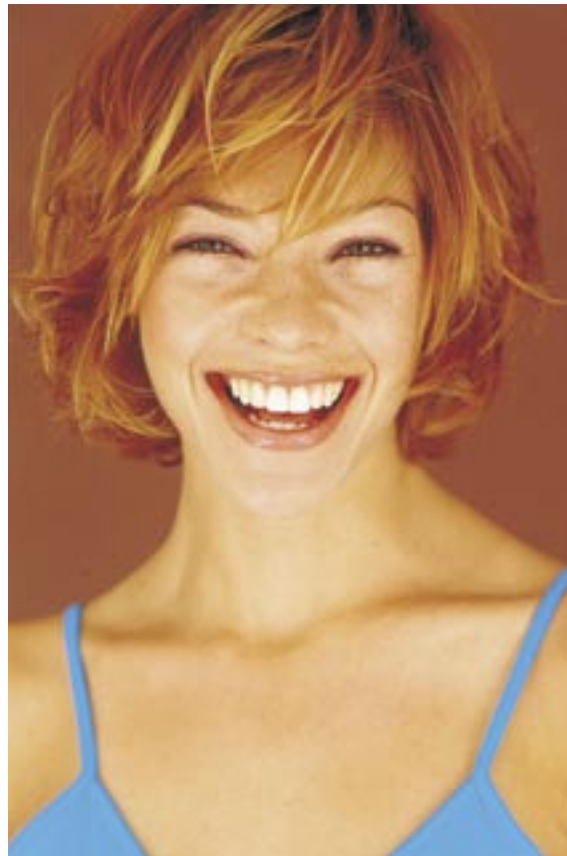
One of the sternest reactions I've had to a new beauty treatment was when I told a friend I was planning on cosmetically altering my teeth.

"You are going too far with this beauty stuff," she spluttered. "You will look totally fake. I just don't think you should do it."

It was, of course, an over-reaction to American makeover shows, which always seem to transform teeth into snowy-white choppers the size of small tombstones. But she had a point. In getting my teeth 'fixed', was I trying to correct something merely because it was imperfect? Would evening up my slightly crooked teeth make my smile false?

Dr Dylan Yung, of Auckland's Aevitas Dentistry, the specialist charged with the job, offered to make me a model of how my teeth would look when he was finished with them. The result didn't completely allay my concerns – it is quite difficult to tell by studying a putty-coloured facsimile of your smile what your new look will be – but his enthusiasm for the process was so infectious, and the before-and-after photographs on the Aevitas website so persuasive, that I found myself agreeing to go ahead with two veneers and some laser gum-shaping.

Did I wake with regrets? Did I prove my friend right? No way. The corrected teeth looked completely natural, the experience was painless, and I couldn't wait



## at-home teeth whitening

The whitening ingredient in DIY teeth-whitening kits is still peroxide, but in solutions weaker than from your dentist. As a result, at-home kits tend to work better on yellowing teeth than on greyish ones, which might need the extra 'oomph' from stronger solutions. Once again, coffee, red wine or cigarettes will severely lessen their effect. There are three main types of home-care kits – brush-on solutions, strips and trays – and they work in similar ways. Brush-on solutions are convenient; trays are more cumbersome but effective. Whitening toothpastes and mouthwashes such as Listerine's Whitening Pre-Brush Rinse can help by cleaning away daily surface stains.

to get out of Dylan's surgery to flash my new smile – now so much better than the original – at anyone who looked at me.

Even my mum had to eat her words. Initially as scornful as my friend, she took one look at me and said brightly: "Oh, darling. That's just so much better."

Cosmetic dentistry – a form of appearance medicine – can correct anything from ugly fillings and discolouration to irregular gum lines and broken or missing teeth. Here are five of the best ways to fix some common complaints.

## 1 laser whitening

Just about the quickest way to brighten a smile is with laser whitening. Procedures such as BriteSmile and Zoom! are non-invasive and relatively quick (approximately an hour to an hour and a half, depending on your level of discolouration), and are tailored to give you the level of 'lightness' you want (unlike in the US, pure-white smiles are not favoured by dentists here).

While your mouth is held open by a plastic mouthpiece, a light is shone on a gel that's applied to your teeth. The light activates the gel, made from pH-balanced hydrogen peroxide, and your teeth are whitened, sometimes by as many as eight shades. You may find your teeth get a little sensitive during and after the process, a normal reaction that diminishes in a day or so and is the result of your teeth becoming dehydrated.

Dentists often supply customised take-home kits so you can maintain the whiteness at home because unless you totally avoid coffee, red wine and cigarettes, your teeth will eventually become discoloured again. If you are relatively careful, however, the results can last up to four years. Prices vary but you can expect to pay about \$1000. ➤

## 2 porcelain veneers and crowns

Wafer-thin veneers can completely change the appearance of your teeth. They can make them straighter, wider, longer and more even. They can mask discolouration that can't be corrected with whitening, and even out chips and cracks. A further benefit is that they can be used to strengthen a weakened tooth. If the veneers are applied properly, no one apart from a professional will ever know they are there.

First your dentist will take an impression of the tooth and then modify it – usually by giving it a light buffing to allow for the added thickness of the veneer itself. A temporary veneer will be fitted to the modified tooth while the impression is sent to a specialist, who will make the veneer according to the dentist's instructions. Two weeks or so later, the temporary veneer will be replaced with the real thing, which will be bonded to your tooth.

Crowns, or caps, are similar to veneers but they are usually used to help restore badly damaged teeth, since a crown will protect a tooth from fracturing.

As with veneers, the cost of crowns is difficult to estimate because prices vary from dentist to dentist. The best advice is to get an estimate from your dentist first.



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## 3 composite bonding

Resin composites work in much the same way as porcelain veneers do, but they are cheaper and therefore more accessible. As with porcelain veneers, little or no anaesthesia is needed for your dentist to fit them. If you need only a cosmetic tidy-up to give your smile a whole new lease of life, resin composites may be all that you require.

## 4 changing your fillings

If you hate your amalgam fillings, you can replace them with something more aesthetically pleasing. New composite materials look more natural than silver and can improve the strength of your teeth. Direct placement is the term given to a new filling. The other type is an indirect bonded filling: made of plastic or ceramic, they are alternatives to crowns or caps. They are also often used when an existing filling can't be repaired without risking the tooth fracturing. It's a two-visit procedure – your new composite needs to be made by a specialist – but a stronger tooth is the result.

## 5 dental implants

Fell off your bike and lost a tooth? Son got whacked in the mouth by a cricket ball? Dental implants are false teeth without the fake appearance. Fixed by a special screw that's embedded in the jaw bone, implants look and feel like real teeth. They can also be used to fasten dentures – important if you worry about your 'falsies' becoming dislodged. ■