

How to... Keep a Winning Smile

Have you ever thought someone was an attractive person when you saw them from a distance, but then changed your mind when you saw them smile? Or leaned in to kiss the one you love, only to be met by “dragon breath”? A smile can be your best asset or your worst stumbling block in your personal relationships, your career, or even just in how you perceive yourself. A beautiful smile is so appealing because it likely is worn by a healthy, happy individual. That translates to success, happiness, and even more smiles. So how can you ensure that your mouth is well taken care of? Here are some helpful tips and information gathered from Dr. Greg Grobmyer, Dr. Steve Kail, and Dr. Joseph Leonard of Premier Dental Center.

How it works-

Every time you eat, bacteria begin to break down the sugar from the food that gets stuck around your teeth and convert it to an acid. This acid actually dissolves the strong tooth structure called the enamel (the strongest material in your whole body!), leaving holes in the teeth through which MORE bacteria can enter. This is called a cavity. A deep enough cavity causes pain or even loss of the tooth. Bacteria around the teeth and under the gums cause inflammation as your body fights off the infection, making your gums bleed, giving you bad breath, and even eating away the bone around your teeth until they get loose or even fall out! This gum disease, also known as periodontal disease or “pyorrhea”, also contributes to heart disease, diabetes, premature and low birth weight babies, respiratory diseases, osteoporosis, and stroke! This is not something to mess around with! Luckily, every bit of it is preventable and treatable.

It all starts with keeping them clean-

The best defense is a strong offense. Keeping the bacteria from accumulating around your teeth and gums is the most surefire way to keep out of trouble. Brush twice a day, when you wake up and before you go to bed, for several minutes each time. Power toothbrushes DO work better than manual, and may usually be bought at your dental office for much less than at retail stores. Use a soft bristled brush and replace it regularly when it is worn. Floss every day. (If this is too much to ask, floss only the teeth you want to keep.) Flossing is the ONLY way to remove bacteria from between your teeth where

your toothbrush can't reach. Just imagine that old food and bacteria sitting there between your teeth day after day. For bad breath, brush both your teeth and your tongue thoroughly multiple times a day and use an alcohol-free mouthwash (they don't dry out the mouth) containing chlorine dioxide, which bonds to and neutralizes sulfur molecules responsible for odor. No matter how good you are at your home care, bacteria still build up, hardening into a solid mass called tarter or calculus which can only be removed by a professional cleaning. It is critical to get this build-up removed at least twice a year to prevent gum disease. At these cleanings, the dentist will also check for cavities and signs of oral cancer.

Once the damage is done-

If bacteria have done damage to your teeth, it is likely repairable if caught early enough. And with the modern anesthetics and techniques available, it can be done with little if any discomfort. The new standard for catching cavities early is a cavity detection laser, which can detect soft, infected areas of tooth structure long before they can even be seen. "Gone are the days when the 'hole' in your tooth had to be big enough to poke into it with something sharp to identify it as decay," says Dr. Greg Grobmyer, of Premier Dental Center. "Early detection means less tooth has to be removed, stopping the disease process before it can do much damage and making treatment much easier." Small cavities are repaired by removing the decayed part of the tooth and replacing it with filling material. Tooth colored filling materials are now the strongest and best choice for anywhere in the mouth, creating an invisible fix and doing away with the use of black silver-mercury fillings. Larger cavities or broken teeth require restoration with crowns, sometimes called "caps", which surround, replace, and reenforce weakened tooth structure with metal and/or porcelain. There are many types of crowns, and the price and procedure vary with each type. Your dentist will advise you on what is best for your specific situation. If the damage is too severe and the tooth requires removal, your dentist can suggest ways to replace it. Bridges are like several crowns connected to teeth on each side of a space and are fixed in place. Partial dentures are less expensive, but come in and out and are much bulkier in the mouth. If all teeth are removed or missing, full dentures may be necessary. Modern dental implants can be used to replace single or multiple teeth or to anchor a denture. Consult with your dentist on which method is right for you.

Give your mouth a makeover-

“The television show ‘Extreme Makeover’ has really allowed patients to see what is possible with modern dental techniques,” says Dr. Grobmyer. “Many people who never thought about it before are now asking us about how we can improve their smile!” So now that we have discussed how to make sure you HAVE teeth, lets talk about how to make them look great! Cosmetic dentistry can turn an average or even unappealing mouth into a dazzling, head-turning smile. The most common cosmetic procedure today is tooth whitening. Whitening, or bleaching, can eliminate stains and reverse the yellowing common with aging and can hide minor imperfections in tooth size or alignment, giving a younger, healthier appearance to the face. Bleaching can be done two ways. The first is professional take home whitening kits with custom trays. The dentist makes clear trays into which you can place a professional strength whitening gel. This material is much stronger and more effective than over the counter whiteners. The custom trays are worn once or twice a day for thirty minutes to an hour for a period ranging from a few days to weeks, depending on the level of discoloration. Once your lighter shade is achieved, your material may be used for “touch ups” occasionally as needed to maintain your new smile. The second method for whitening is called “laser” bleaching. This is an in-office procedure that usually takes about an hour. The dentist isolates your teeth and places a powerful bleaching agent on them, activating it with a laser light. You leave the office with much whiter teeth!

Most other dental imperfections may be fixed with bonding or veneers. Bonding is the placement of white colored filling material to mask discolorations, close gaps, or reshape teeth. This is a one visit procedure and can often be done without anesthesia. Bonding is relatively inexpensive and can look great, but will likely stain or break and need to be replaced or repaired every few years. The ultimate in cosmetic dental treatment is the placement of porcelain veneers. Nothing can come close to the durability and amazing esthetic results possible with this procedure. Thin, porcelain laminates are bonded to the teeth to instantly change the color, shape, and alignment of the teeth to create an astoundingly beautiful smile. This is a true “smile makeover”.

How to choose a dentist-

Before randomly walking into a dental office and placing your health, safety, and appearance in their hands, first do some research. Don’t sacrifice the quality of your healthcare for convenience. If you were having brain surgery, you wouldn’t pick someone just because they were the cheapest or the closest to your home. Talk to others you trust to find out their opinion of the doctor they

see. Schedule an appointment to meet the dentist and discuss your concerns. A good dentist using modern equipment and techniques will give you a video tour of the inside of your mouth and will discuss options for treatment. They will have ways of helping you put fears to rest and relax during treatment and to minimize discomfort. Ask to see before and after pictures of their work before committing to major cosmetic procedures. Cosmetic procedures are not taught in dental school, so ask how many hours of post graduate cosmetic training the dentist has gone through. The top post graduate teaching facilities like the Las Vegas Institute (LVI) may offer 80 to 100 hours per course and teach hands on with a live patient. If you so desire, many dentists will refer you to patients who have gone through the procedure at their office and are willing to tell you what it was like and how they feel about the results. Above all, make sure you trust who you allow to do your work. They should be caring, patient, knowledgeable, and willing to answer any questions you have. Remember, your smile can change your life.