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Dedication

*I dedicate this book to my
patients who remind me
every day why I went into this
profession and my awesome family
who encourage me to relentlessly pursue my
vision of giving you all a “White” smile.*

Dr. Alex White

3805 Airport Blvd
Mobile, AL 36608
251-343-9998

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NEWEST BREAKTHROUGHS IN DENTISTRY

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Disease Shows Up in the Mouth First

As a dentist, I'm extremely proud that my patients trust me with their dental health. Taking care of people's teeth is not a small thing. Research has shown that an attractive, healthy smile is about more than your appearance, it can actually improve your quality of life. In fact, studies have shown that smiling can:

- Boost your mood as well as the moods of the people you meet
- Lower your stress level
- Give your immune system a boost
- Reduce blood pressure
- Release serotonin, as well as endorphins and natural pain killers

-
- Lift the muscles in your face, actually making you look younger!

That's only a partial list of the incredible things a healthy smile can do for you. However, your smile has a power that goes far beyond boosting your mental health – a power that you might not be aware of.

Your smile can be an indicator of what's going on inside of you.

The fact is, your dental health isn't just about the condition of your teeth and gums. Sometimes, it can be the first sign that you are experiencing other issues with your overall health that might seem to be completely unrelated to what's going on inside your mouth.

Dental professionals like me actually have a name for this. We call it the “mouth-body connection.”

In the dental profession (when it's just dentists talking to other dentists), we also call it the “oral-systemic connection.” It's a complicated term for a fairly simple fact. We've discovered, in study after study, that what happens in your mouth can significantly affect the health of the rest of your body. And symptoms of what's happening in your body often show up in your mouth.

The upside of this fact is that if you stay on top of your dental health – brushing twice daily, flossing daily, seeing your dentist twice a year (at least) and taking care of any problems that might pop up quickly – you can prevent a lot of health problems that affect the rest of your body.

The downside is, if you don't take care of your teeth and gums, you're putting yourself at risk for some major health problems, including diabetes, heart disease and cancer. That's right -- the three biggest causes of death in America are all related, in some way, to your dental health.

Chances are you didn't realize taking care of your teeth was that important!

It also makes those twice-yearly (at least – but we'll get to that later) visits to the dentist much more important than you might think. Coming to see me is about more than just keeping your mouth clean and fresh and taking care of little problems like cavities and periodontal disease. The reality is, conditions in my patients' mouths can alert me to all kinds of health problems that affect much more than just their smiles – and those same conditions can lead to serious health issues down the line.

For example, a patient might come into my office experiencing the classic symptoms of periodontal disease – problems like bleeding gums, or swelling from infections. This, in itself, is a condition that needs treatment, as well as one that happens to be incredibly common.

But the symptoms of periodontal disease can also be a sign of a serious disease that affects the entire body -- diabetes. In fact, periodontal infections are much more common in diabetics, because their bodies have a harder time fighting the bacteria that cause infection.

The mouth-body connection also works in reverse. A periodontal infection may be a patient's first indication that they're suffering from diabetes, but at the same time, because diabetics have a harder time fighting infection, controlling that periodontal disease may be more difficult, which in turn makes their entire body more vulnerable.

That's why a good relationship with an experienced dentist is especially important to diabetics. By helping patients manage periodontal disease and keep bacteria levels low, I also help those who are diabetic have better control of their condition, which keeps their bodies stronger and healthier.

If you're not diabetic, that's obviously great news – but it doesn't get you off the hook as far as the dangers of gum disease are concerned. The American Heart Association has uncovered a link between gum disease and heart disease. This is especially scary because most people will experience gum disease at some point in their lives. Now, studies have shown it may be more dangerous than high cholesterol when it comes to increasing heart disease risk.

The reason? Again – you can blame it on the bacteria. Periodontal disease bacteria can leave your mouth and enter your bloodstream, which can lead to blood clots, which can then lead to heart attacks. To the point where one U.S. study said patients who suffer from periodontitis, which is an advanced form of gum disease, are 25% more likely to develop coronary heart disease.

Another reason why keeping those dental appointments is so important.

Here’s yet another.

Periodontal disease has now been linked to cancer. A study published in *The Lancet Oncology* showed that men with a history of gum disease are 14% more likely to develop cancer, 30% more likely to develop blood cancer and a shocking 49% more likely to develop kidney cancer. The Dana-Farber Cancer Institute and the Harvard School of Public Health conducted a separate study concluding that gum disease sufferers are 63% more likely to develop pancreatic cancer.

I’m not telling you this to scare you. But it’s important that you understand that uncontrolled gum disease is more than just an inconvenience – it can actually be dangerous, and even deadly. Those same bacteria that wreak havoc in your mouth can do even more damage when they travel to the rest of your body.

However, not every “mouth-body” connection issue can be blamed on bacteria. Loose teeth, or teeth that are actually falling out, are usually blamed on gum disease. But they may also be a sign of osteoporosis, especially in women. Women are more likely to suffer from the degenerative bone disease that causes bone loss – and we now know that the same condition that causes brittle bones in the body can also lead to bone loss in the jaw. As a result, tooth loss is three times more likely in women who suffer from osteoporosis than it is in women with healthy bones.

In fact, if you’re a woman, you should be careful with your dental health in general. It may not be exactly fair, but just

being female means you're more likely to experience dental problems. It all comes down to hormones – when your hormone levels are high, your body has a harder time fighting bacteria. Which means those natural fluctuations during puberty, pregnancy and menopause all make you more susceptible to gingivitis.

And if you're pregnant, you should pay special attention to your dental health -- periodontal disease has been linked to increased rates of premature birth and low birth weight babies.

All of this might sound like a lot of bad news. But I promise, I'm not writing this to ruin your day. I want you to understand that regular dental visits aren't a luxury. A healthy mouth is an essential part of a healthy body, and when one part suffers, chances are the other will suffer as well.

The good news is, when you take good care of your teeth and gums and see your dentist regularly, you're not just keeping your smile healthy, you're keeping your entire body healthy!

So over the next few chapters, I'll explain all the ways I can help you protect your dental and overall health – plus how to achieve and maintain the kind of smile you'll be proud to show off for years to come.

Chapter 2

HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT DENTIST

Finding the Right Person to Take Care of Your Smile

When it comes to choosing the person who will take care of your teeth – and keep your whole body healthier in the process – it’s essential that you choose the right man (or woman) for the job. That means you need to find a dentist who you will feel comfortable with, and who is skilled and experienced at performing the specific kinds of services you’re looking for.

So it’s important, as a first step, to understand exactly what you are looking for. Dentistry has changed a lot over the past decade, and there are now more options available to you than ever before. So before you just Google the word “dentist” and your town, or make an appointment with your best friend’s dentist, or make another appointment with the same dentist you’ve been seeing since you were a kid, you might want to ask yourself a few quick questions.

-
1. Are you at all nervous about going to the dentist? Are you afraid of pain, or needles, or anything else associated with a dental visit? If so, you may want to look for a dentist who offers sedation.
 2. Do you want a dentist who uses the most modern, up to date technology? You'll be more comfortable with a dentist with a practice that uses things like computer imagery and lasers for treatment.
 3. Are you interested in improving the look of your smile? You may benefit from a dentist who performs cosmetic dentistry procedures like whitening and veneers.
 4. Do you wish your teeth were straighter? Straightening teeth is no longer limited to orthodontists, and many dentists offer new technologies like Invisalign® and other alternatives that make the process easier, faster and more discreet.
 5. Are you missing teeth? You might be interested in a dentist who offers dental implants or face-lift dentures.
 6. Are you suffering from any major dental issues? You'll probably want a dentist who is experienced in dealing with your specific problems.

Beginning your Search

Once you know what you need from your dentist, the next step is to formulate a plan to find a dentist in your area – or even out of your area – who will give you the type of treatment you not only need, but want and deserve.

And, since I've already mentioned it, a Google search including your town and the specialty (or specialties) you're looking for could leave you with dozens of names of dentists in your area, all ready and willing to take you on as a new patient.

However, the fact that a dentist advertises that he or she performs the services or uses the technologies that are important to you is not enough to guarantee you'll find a dentist you can trust. Your best bet is always going to be a

well-trained professional with a modern office using state-of-the-art equipment. To find that ideal dentist, you'll need to do a little bit of research. Here are a few places to look:

Your Current Dentist

If you're currently seeing (or avoiding seeing) a specific dentist, he or she may be the best place to start your search. You might actually be unaware that your dentist also performs the very same services you're looking for, like sedation or dental implants (or both)! But you can find out by asking the receptionist if your dentist performs those procedures, and how often.

You can also discuss your issues with your current dentist, but you need to be aware of two things. First of all, since your dentist likely offers some version of many of the services you want, he or she may offer to perform them. But this alone won't magically transform your dentist into an expert in the procedure you need.

Which brings me to the second thing: with some dentists, you just can't teach an old dog new tricks. The dental profession is always changing, with new technologies making more possible all the time. However, many dentists are content to remain squarely within their comfort zones, practicing exactly the same way they did 10 or 20 years ago. Which means your best bet may be to take some extra time to find a dentist who specializes in the procedures you want and need rather than hope your current dentist will "get it."

You can also ask your dentist for a referral to a dentist he or she knows and trusts that is more experienced in the procedures you want – for example, not all dentists offer sedation, and if your dental health is suffering because you're afraid to see your regular dentist, he or she may refer you to a dentist who can help you deal with your anxiety and get the care you need.

However, since retaining you as a patient may be your dentist's priority, you may not feel comfortable asking, and he or she may not be forthcoming with information.

This means you may want to take your search beyond your current dentist's office.

People You Know

Many people find their dentists by word of mouth – asking friends, relatives, coworkers, even acquaintances about their own experiences. If you know someone who's had a positive experience with a dentist who specializes in what you're looking for, or, if you're not looking for anything more than a good dentist, if you know someone who has great teeth, ask them for a name and think about setting up a consultation appointment.

And if no one you know is talking about their great dentist, ask around.

The Internet

As I mentioned before, a Google search of what you're looking for is very likely to give you a long list of names to choose from in your area in the search results. The American Dental Association also has a search function on their website at www.ada.org that can help you find a dentist. You'll even be able to click on the names of the dentists listed and visit their websites to learn more about them.

If there are no dentists who meet your criteria in your area, don't panic. Today, many people travel out of their local area for medical and/or dental care – sometimes even making dental treatment part of their vacation plans. If you don't live near the right dentist, finding one in another area may be your best option. Just be sure to do all the necessary research before committing to treatment.

Researching Your Dentist

Your dental health is important to your overall health. That's why it's a good idea to get as much information about a prospective dentist as you can before treatment begins – the more you know, the better your chances of getting the results you want. A good place to start is online. Most dentists have

websites that tell you where they went to school, any special training they have and how long they've been practicing, along with any particular specialties they might want to highlight.

Just be aware that these websites are designed to offer more than information – a well-designed website is a marketing tool to get you to schedule an appointment and come into a dentist's office. That doesn't mean you shouldn't use the information provided on a dentist's website – in fact, you should check out the website of any dentist you find through other means, as it likely contains a lot of valuable information. Reading through a dentist's carefully crafted web content, however, should be the beginning of your research, not the end of it.

If you're researching a dentist who doesn't have a website, call the office and ask the receptionist for the information you need. If she cannot provide it, she should be able to connect you with someone who can, or take a message and get back to you within a reasonable amount of time. If you don't get an answer, cross that dentist off your list. You want to be able to trust your smile to someone who has an effective, well-trained team – another point we'll get to a little later.

Experience in the procedures you need – especially if you're interested in specialized treatments like sedation, implants or cosmetic dentistry -- is also important. You definitely don't want to be a dentist's first-ever patient, or even their 10th! It only makes sense that the more experience your dentist has working with the various types of procedures you need, the better your overall experience with that dentist will be.

The right training also makes a big difference. Look for a dentist who has supplemented their education with additional training in any specialized techniques that you're looking for, ideally at a reputable institute that requires hands-on training time.

And that extensive training shouldn't stop with your dentist. You also want to be sure your dentist is surrounded by a well-trained, experienced, friendly and professional team.

If you're interested in any cosmetic procedures, it can be really helpful to ask to see before and after pictures of patients. Not only will you get a clearer picture of how a dentist works with each patient's unique smile, you'll also get at least an idea of the range and scope of the work he or she has done. Don't just settle for stock photos on a website – ask to see actual photos of actual patients. You can also ask a prospective dentist to share stories of how he or she approached other cases that are similar to yours.

On that note, talking with a prospective dentist, or at least his or her patient representative, is a great way to feel confident in your choice. If you're a new patient considering trusting a dentist with your oral (and overall) health, you should be able to meet that person for a consultation, or at least talk with a representative who can address your concerns and explain exactly how the office works. A great dental team will give you a clear picture of exactly what to expect before you sit down in the chair – so you can feel confident keeping your appointment and giving your smile the care it deserves.

Many dental practices also offer extra touches ranging from video and music options for your entertainment to massaging chairs. I'm not saying the absence of these bells and whistles should be a deal-breaker, especially if you've found a great dentist who will otherwise meet your needs. Still, it's nice to know exactly what will be available to you when you put your smile in his or her hands. And while emergencies are rare, it's always a good idea to ask any prospective dentist how they would handle one – either in the middle of treatment or while you're at home, at work or otherwise out on your own. Knowing the answers to all of these questions will help you feel more confident and comfortable.

Yes, it sounds like a lot to remember, and it is. But you shouldn't worry about asking a prospective dentist to supply as much information as possible – you deserve to know as much about the person who you will be trusting with your smile as you possibly can!

Questions To Ask a Prospective Dentist

To help you make sure you don't forget any important details, here is a list of questions to ask a prospective dentist before going forward with treatment. Any dentist who does not willingly answer these questions should probably be avoided. Remember, you deserve to feel comfortable and confident. So go ahead and ask!

1. How long have you been in practice?
2. How many cases like mine have you handled?
3. Where did you train and for how long?
5. How has your team been trained?
6. What can you offer me to help me relax during treatment (if you need it)?
7. What will you do if I start to feel pain or discomfort during my treatment?
8. Can I speak with any of your former patients?
10. What should I expect during and after treatment?

These are only questions to ask a prospective dentist, so they are fairly general. If you consult with a dentist about your specific dental issues, you will obviously have other questions that are more specific to the types of treatment you need. These questions are no less important. If you're not comfortable with a prospective dentist's answers, or their general attitude, that's a clear sign to look somewhere else before you get in any deeper.

The goal is to find the dentist who you feel most comfortable and secure with, and who has the right combination of extensive training, hands-on experience and positive results. You may need to consult with a few different dentists before you make a decision. The more you know about a potential dentist and the procedures he or she is recommending, the better your chance of having a pleasant experience with a great outcome.

And isn't that what you and your smile deserve?

Chapter 3

YOUR APPOINTMENT

What to Expect from an Extraordinary Dental Visit

If you can't remember the last time you sat down in the dentist's chair, you may have forgotten exactly what seeing the dentist is like. And honestly, there are all different kinds of dentists offering all different kinds of experiences when you walk into their offices.

At my office, we strive to deliver an extraordinary dental visit, every time. We believe that's what our patients deserve. So, just to remind you of how simple and relaxing seeing your dentist can be, I'll take you through a typical visit to my office based on a basic, twice-yearly appointment for a cleaning and exam.

When you first arrive, you'll enter a comfortable reception area, where you'll be greeted and asked to check in. I prefer

to call it a reception area – as opposed to a waiting room – because at my office, and any extraordinary dental office, we know our patients’ time is valuable. So we strive to keep waiting time to a minimum.

You’ll be taken back to a treatment room, where you’ll be seated in a comfortable chair. This chair is likely to be the most comfortable chair you’ve ever sat in.

You’ll want to take it home and put it in front of your TV. If you haven’t had x-rays of your mouth taken in a while, you may choose to have x-rays taken during your visit. Although, at my office, and a lot of extraordinary dental practices, we don’t call them x-rays anymore. The latest technology is called digital radiography – it’s completely computerized, a lot more comfortable (and more comprehensive) than old-school, filmed dental x-rays, and uses 90% less radiation. You’ll still be covered with a special blanket to block any exposure, so you can feel confident that you’re 100% safe.

The best part of digital radiography is, you won’t have to wait for your results. Like any digital photo, your images will be available instantly, so any problems that can’t be seen with the naked eye or found with dental instruments can be spotted and dealt with (or planned for) during your visit.

Next, you’ll spend some time with a dental hygienist – who will transform your smile from dull and stained (or just a little less than perfect) to sparkling clean. However, a hygienist is about much more than just cleaning your teeth.

Just like dentists, not all hygienists are equal. All of them need to take continuing education courses to maintain their licenses and continue to work. When that happens, a lot of them just concentrate on meeting the basic requirements so that they can keep practicing.

However, at an extraordinary dental office, you can expect extraordinary hygienists who use that continuing education requirement as an opportunity to stay on top of the latest techniques and technologies. That means your hygienist will likely be highly trained in everything from periodontal disease

and treatments to the best ways to maintain restorations and cosmetic dentistry.

Don't worry if it's been a long time since you've seen a dentist or had your teeth cleaned. At an extraordinary dental office, the goal is to make you comfortable taking care of your teeth, not to shame or embarrass you about what you've done in the past. Whatever condition your mouth is in, the staff at an extraordinary dental office has only one goal – to keep your teeth healthy. Making sure you're happy and comfortable is a big part of that. After all, we want you to come back!

Before your cleaning begins, the hygienist will give you a paper bib (to keep your clothes clean) and proceed to remove all the plaque, tartar and other gunk from your teeth with special instruments. If you find this experience at all uncomfortable, you can ask to be sedated during your visit when you set up your appointment. Not all dental offices offer sedation, but most of the extraordinary ones do!

Some extraordinary dental offices also offer a state of the art cleaning procedure called laser bacterial reduction, which the hygienist will also perform. This type of cleaning, which utilizes lasers to “zap” the bacteria that naturally occur in your mouth, significantly reduces the bacteria that causes gum disease --, painlessly!

The hygienist will ask if you've been having any issues with your teeth or gums and look them over for any obvious problems, including measuring your gums for “pockets” that indicate periodontal disease and looking for cavities. Any problems will be reported to your dentist so he or she can take a closer look and prescribe the appropriate treatment.

Then comes the best part. Your teeth will be polished until they're completely clean and shiny – any stains from food or drinks will be removed and you'll have a dazzling, perfectly-clean smile. Different offices use different technologies to clean your teeth, but the results are basically the same – your smile will be brighter than it's been in months.

Once your teeth are looking and feeling their cleanest, it's time for your dentist to step in and perform your checkup.

Your dentist will look over your teeth in detail, using mirrors, lights and other equipment that provide the best view of what's going on inside your mouth.

Some extraordinary dental offices, including mine, offer digital dentistry – state of the art, modern, computerized equipment that does what human beings can't. Digital dentistry technologies range from the digital x-rays and laser bacteria removal I already mentioned to cavity detection, surgery and designing beautiful implants and crowns.

Your dentist will check your mouth for oral cancer – a quick, painless process that is also incredibly important – and look for any dental problems like cavities or gum disease. You'll be asked about any issues you've been having, and if your dentist finds a problem you don't know about, he or she will explain what's going on and talk about your treatment options. Your dentist will tell you when to come back – either to correct a problem or for another checkup. You'll set up a return appointment with the receptionist...

...and that's about it.

All in all, it takes about an hour. And that one hour out of your week, just two (or maybe a few more) times a year, is all you need to make sure your teeth are healthy and your smile is beautiful, or to get your smile back on the road to recovery.

Plus, those two visits a year may help you protect your overall health!

Chapter 4

RELAXATION DENTISTRY

How to Experience Fear and Pain-Free Dental Visits

A dental visit should be easy and relaxing. But if you're like a lot of people, just reading that last chapter made you a little bit uncomfortable. The fact is, fear of the dentist is one of the most common adult fears. How common? Some studies say close to 75% of Americans – almost three out of every four adults – admit to at least some dental fear.

A scarier fact is that around 30% of American adults don't go to the dentist at all because they're afraid. Or, they don't go until they have a major dental emergency and can no longer avoid it.

If you fall into either of those categories, I want you to know that I understand. Most modern dentists now realize that

dental fear is normal, and nothing any person should be embarrassed about or ashamed of.

But even more importantly, I want you to know that at my office and many like it, there is hope. And it comes in the form of relaxation, or sedation, dentistry.

What is Sedation Dentistry?

Sedation Dentistry is simply dentistry performed on a patient who has been put into a relaxed, calm state through the use of a sedative drug.

Dentists use it in a wide range of situations, from basic treatments like fillings and deep cleanings to complex procedures like root canals and gum surgery.

Chances are good that you've experienced at least some kind of sedation during a dental procedure in your life. However, this is not the same thing as what we call "Sedation Dentistry." I'll get to why a little later on.

The reason dentists use Sedation Dentistry is simple – to make you comfortable. If you're one of the unlucky people who have ever endured a filling or root canal when you weren't completely numb, you probably understand why this is so important. Going to the dentist isn't always a comfortable experience for patients, especially when the treatments are complicated or invasive. Sedation makes sure that even the most involved treatments that might otherwise be uncomfortable don't cause any pain.

This leads right into the other – and maybe more important – benefit of Sedation Dentistry. It gets rid of dental fear. We've learned that fear of pain, not the pain itself, is the main reason people who can afford dental care stay out of my chair.

And as we've already discussed, this can lead to all sorts of problems down the line.

Why Do People Fear the Dentist?

What makes me and my colleagues in the dental field so scary? There are actually a lot of different reasons, some that you might not even know exist. Here is a partial list of the fear factors that bother people the most:

- **Fear Of Pain During Treatment**
The most common -- but by no means the only -- reason for dental fears.
- **Fear Of The Dentist**
For some people, the mere sight of a medical or dental professional like me in a white coat is terrifying to some people.
- **Embarrassment About The Condition of Your Teeth**
This includes being afraid your dentist will yell at you for neglecting your teeth, as well as fear of anyone looking at your teeth.
- **Fear of Lack of Control in the Dentist's Chair**
Some people are actually afraid the dentist will perform the wrong treatment or treatment they don't want!
- **Fear of Needles**
This is a big one -- people who hate shots are likely to also experience dental anxiety.
- **Fear of the Dental Office**
Yes, even my state-of-the-art, comfortable office can scare some people. Sometimes the sights, smells and sounds of a dental office remind people of bad dental experiences from their past.
- **Fear of Gagging or Choking**
Some people don't like the idea of not being allowed to swallow.
- **Fear of Crying or Having a Panic Attack**
People who are really afraid can actually be afraid of their fear, and how they will react when that fear kicks in.
- **Fear of The Drill (or other Dental Equipment)**
That whirring sound can be enough to terrify some people.
- **Issues With Numbness**

Some people worry they won't be able to breathe when they're numb, while others worry they won't be able to get numb in the first place.

- **Fear of Being Awake**
Some people worry they'll be able to feel, hear, smell and experience everything that happens during their treatment.

Chances are, if you're afraid to spend time with me, you've experienced at least one of these fears, and maybe more.

The problem is, when it comes to going to the dentist, you have more to fear than fear itself – at least if that fear keeps you away from the dentist's chair. Because no matter how well you take care of your teeth at home, seeing a dentist at least twice a year is really the only way to make sure that your teeth or gums don't suffer from big problems.

The typical six months a patient waits between appointments doesn't give a dental problem a long time to develop. That's why people need regular dental check-ups -- because it almost guarantees that little problems will be taken care of before they become big ones.

On the other hand, the longer you go without seeing a dentist, the more time problems you might not even be aware of have to grow. The result is people who fear the dentist can wind up desperately needing the kind of major dental work they're afraid of in the first place!

It's a vicious cycle – the longer you avoid the dentist out of fear, the scarier conditions in your mouth may become.

That's why Sedation Dentistry was developed – to provide fearful patients with a real solution to their dental-phobia.

Why Sedation Dentistry?

Sedation has always been used in dentistry to some degree. But today, what we call Sedation Dentistry is different from what you might have experienced when you had cavities filled as a child. That difference is

mostly about when sedation treatment is offered, and how it's administered.

In the "old days," dentists only used sedating medications to reduce or eliminate pain. Sometimes, a little pain was able to sneak by, which, in a fearful patient, could turn into a bad experience that might lead to more fear.

But today, Sedation Dentists understand how important it is to offer fearful patients an alternative to either staying away from the dentist or suffering through their dental visits.

That's why I offer my patients sedation in just about any situation where they might feel uncomfortable, from root canals and oral surgery to cleanings and exams. That way they can completely relax during treatment. They know ahead of time that they will feel nothing, and maybe even remember nothing. This lets them get past their fear and receive the dental care they need without stress.

A History of Sedation Dentistry

As I mentioned before, Sedation Dentistry isn't exactly new. Pain and anxiety relief has been a part of dental treatment for years. True, not all dentists offered it, and the options they offered were not always the most effective! But the idea of using drugs to alleviate pain during dentistry is not, in itself, a new idea.

In fact, it dates back to 1846, at an amphitheater packed with doctors and med students at Harvard University. Dentist William T.G. Morton took to the stage and dazzled the crowd by giving the gas ether to a patient, right there in front of an audience full of people. A surgeon then stepped in and performed an operation on the patient, who felt no pain. From that day on, anesthetics became a regular part of surgery, beginning with the use of ether.

However, this wasn't the first attempt by a dentist to use chemicals to alleviate pain in a patient. A year before, in 1845, a dentist named Horace Wells tried to use nitrous oxide during a similar demonstration which was also held at Harvard. How did Wells do? His unfortunate patient cried out in pain – and Wells was booed off the stage!

Nitrous oxide, now commonly known as laughing gas, went on to become one of the most popular dental anesthetics around, proving Wells was at least on the right track. In fact, today's Sedation Dentists still use nitrous oxide, usually in combination with other medications.

Their goal, however, is more than just pain relief.

When I perform Sedation Dentistry, my goal is to completely relax my patient so he or she can have the dental treatment they need without feeling afraid. This is accomplished with the use of other types of drugs beyond nitrous oxide, including pills (oral sedation) and, in some cases, IV sedation. The purpose of these drugs is to relax patients more deeply and make them less aware of what's going on around them – including pain.

Is Sedation Dentistry Right for You?

Do you hate the thought of going to the dentist? Do you avoid or put off needed dental visits? Is there a problem with your teeth that you've been avoiding? Or do you see the dentist when you're supposed to, but suffer through each visit?

If your answer to any of these questions is yes, you are exactly the type of patient Sedation Dentistry was developed for.

Specifically, Sedation Dentistry can be especially helpful to people who:

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- Have been affected by a past, negative dental experience
 - Are afraid of experiencing pain at the dentist
 - Have a fear of needles or drills
 - Have sensitive teeth or gag easily
 - Have avoided the dentist to the point where they have serious dental problems that need attention
 - Want to take care of multiple dental treatments quickly and get as much done in a single visit as possible
 - Simply want a more relaxing, comfortable experience in the dentist's chair
 - Are caring for a child who is afraid of the dentist
 - Are caring for a developmentally disabled or mentally or physically ill adult and don't have time for multiple dental appointments

For these types of people and many others, Sedation Dentistry means the difference between pain and comfort, between stress and relaxation, between avoiding the dentist and getting the dental care they need and deserve. A qualified Sedation Dentist makes it a priority to ensure your comfort in all instances, to listen to your concerns and to develop a treatment plan with your needs in mind.

What Treatments Work with Sedation Dentistry?

To put it simply, basically any treatment I perform can be performed with sedation. That means that even the most fearful patient can keep their teeth healthy, take care of problems and even create the smile of their dreams – comfortably and without fear. To be specific, those treatments include:

- Cleanings
- Exams
- Fillings
- Crowns
- Periodontal disease treatment
- Root Canals
- Dental Implants

-
- Cosmetic Dentistry
 - And more!

What To Expect From Sedation Dentistry

“Sedation” or “Relaxation” dentistry usually means treatment beyond the nitrous oxide you may have experienced when you had cavities filled as a child. In my office, we prescribe an oral medication (a pill) for fearful patients to take before their appointment, in order to reach a deeper level of relaxation. They get so relaxed, normal dental procedures don’t bother them. An oral medication can work by itself, or in combination with nitrous oxide.

Of course, if you’re taking a pill that will sedate you before your treatment, you should arrange for transportation to and from your appointment to make sure you get there (and home) safely.

Oral medications are not enough for every dental phobic. Some sedation dentists also offer intravenous, or IV, sedation. This can be given on its own, or in combination with an oral medication. It’s the highest level of sedation offered for normal dental treatment.

Of course, since it involves needles, it’s also not usually the first choice of fearful patients!

Some dental offices might refer to sedation dentistry as “sleep dentistry,” but sleep actually has nothing to do with it – in reality, patients are awake during their treatment and can understand what their dentist is saying. However, sedation relaxes most patients to the point where they’re not really connected to what’s going on. In their experience, treatment seems to happen very quickly, and they may not even remember it afterwards.

A more old-fashioned dentist may regard the use sedation as more than a patient needs for a simple cleaning or exam, or even a filling. If you have been a

patient of a more “traditional” dentist in the past, you may have been told that the best thing for you to do is “tough it out.”

But modern dentists have since learned that this is not the case. Dentists who offer sedation do it because they want to put your comfort first, and want to make sure you have access to whatever you need to make your treatment a positive experience for you. The goal is to take the best possible care of your teeth, and if you can do that without feeling stress or pain, why not?

Sedation Dentistry could be exactly what you need to give your teeth the kind of care they (and you) deserve.

Chapter 5

G U M D I S E A S E

Win the battle now and save your teeth

I've already mentioned gum disease several times in this book – and with good reason. Gum disease is incredibly common -- 60-70 percent of people will experience it in some form at some point in their lifetime. What that means is, even if you've never had gum disease, at some point in your life, you probably will. Add the fact that once you contract gum disease you're more susceptible to it, and the studies linking gum disease to diabetes, heart disease and cancer, and you'll probably understand why we dentists spend so much time talking about it.

And why I'm going to devote a full chapter to it now.

Why Your Gums Matter

Healthy gums are the foundation of good oral health, because together with the supporting bone, they hold your teeth in place. When they are infected with bacteria, it can destroy gum tissue, eating away at that support system and possibly leading to tooth loss if the condition isn't treated. In fact, periodontal disease causes more tooth loss than cavities in adult patients.

The bacteria that cause gum disease are a normal presence in everyone's mouth – including yours. That's one reason why regular dental care is so important. Dental cleanings remove these bacteria from areas you can't reach with a toothbrush or dental floss. Left to multiply on their own over time, the bacteria can spread from your gums to the supporting bone, and can eventually enter your bloodstream and affect other parts of your body. Gum disease bacteria can even be passed on from person to person through direct contact with saliva.

It sounds a little disgusting, but it's true.

The Different Stages of Gum Disease

As I just said, the bacteria that cause gum disease are always present in our mouths – that's just a fact of life. Those bacteria can be kept in check through regular maintenance like daily brushing and flossing and regular dental visits.

Infection occurs when the bacteria and the toxins (poisons) they produce get out of control and reach the point where they overwhelm your immune system. The lining of the gum tissue next to your tooth (or teeth) becomes swollen, and this inflammation is called gingivitis. This is the earliest, and mildest, phase of gum disease. Regular cleanings and dental checkups usually ensure that gum disease does not spread beyond this stage, at least in a healthy person.

If gingivitis is left untreated or spreads quickly, the toxins move into the surface of your tooth root. This condition is called periodontitis, or periodontal disease. Periodontitis is

when the infection has spread from just the gum tissue into the supporting bone around your teeth. This is the more serious form of gum disease that can eventually lead to bone loss around your teeth, and even loss of your teeth themselves.

Periodontal disease can be generalized (around all of your teeth) or localized (around only some of the teeth). It ranges from mild (only a small amount of bone has been affected) to moderate to advanced (at risk of losing teeth). The longer the infection is allowed to continue, the more bone it will destroy. When periodontal disease isn't caught at a mild or moderate phase, treated, and controlled with proper maintenance, so much bone can be destroyed that the ultimate result is tooth loss.

Some people are more susceptible to periodontal disease than others, depending on how strong their immune system is and how well they fight infection. The tricky part is that everyone's ability to fight off infection varies from day to day and week to week depending on what else is going on with their lives and their health.

These normal variations mean that even people who generally take good care of themselves and their teeth can develop periodontal disease. People whose immune systems are compromised, due to anything from diabetes to a common cold to just being stressed or tired, are more susceptible and their infections tend to develop faster.

It's important to understand that periodontal disease is not curable; once you have it, you will always be more susceptible to it. It is, however, controllable with good home care, and of course, help from your dentist.

In fact, thanks to advanced training and technology in the dental profession, gum problems can now be diagnosed earlier and treated sooner than ever before. In an earlier chapter, I mentioned laser bacterial reduction, an extremely effective form of cleaning, performed by a hygienist, that eliminates much of the bacteria in your gum pockets for up to 6 weeks. This type of cleaning is ideal for anyone who has

experienced gum disease in the past to control their condition and prevent gum disease from returning.

Even if your gum disease has advanced beyond the early phases when your dentist discovers it, there are now a wide range of treatment options that can help stop its progression and restore your mouth (and body) to health. We'll get to those a little later in this chapter.

What Causes Periodontal Disease?

As I mentioned before, the main cause of periodontal disease is bacteria. In the beginning, these bacteria stick to your teeth in the form of plaque, a sticky, colorless film that constantly forms on your teeth. Regular brushing and flossing will remove most of this plaque, but not all of it.

The plaque that is not removed, usually because you can't reach it with normal brushing and flossing, will harden into what we dentists call calculus or tartar. Once plaque hardens into tartar, you won't be able to remove it yourself, meaning those harmful bacteria are now out of your reach – and still multiplying. This is why regular dental visits are so important. Dental hygienists remove tartar and make sure plaque doesn't build up.

No matter how well you care for your teeth at home, no matter what devices you use, you can't always get at plaque below the gum line and between your teeth. It can really build up if you skip those professional cleanings at your dental office – so don't do it!

Which leads me to another important point. Every person is not the same when it comes to how often they need a professional cleaning. The old "see your dentist twice a year" philosophy may not apply to you, because no two people are alike -- each individual patient needs to be seen and treated in the way that helps them maintain their dental and overall health. A dentist or hygienist is the only person who can really tell how often you should have your teeth professionally cleaned to stay healthy. You may need to

come in more than twice a year -- and even this schedule will probably change as conditions in your body do.

This is what makes a good dental team so important. Instead of automatically seeing you every six months, they will monitor the ups and downs of your dental health and provide the treatment you need to stay as healthy as possible.

That said, no matter how hard you and your dentist work to maintain that health, you can still experience gum disease because of other factors that can also affect your immune system and gum health. These include:

- Smoking or other tobacco use
Not only is tobacco linked to a laundry list of serious illnesses including cancer, heart disease and lung disease, recent studies have shown that tobacco users have a dramatically increased risk of developing gum disease.
- Genetics
If you have problem gums, you might be able to blame your parents. Studies have shown that close to 30% of people are genetically predisposed to developing gum disease, and those people could actually be six times more likely to get it than people without a family history of the problem.
There is now a test to determine if you carry the gene that makes you more susceptible to periodontal disease – if you know you have it, you can step up your maintenance routine to help stop gum disease before it starts. Ask your dental team if this is something you are interested in finding out about.
- Puberty, Pregnancy and Menopause in Women
Hormonal changes can wreak havoc on your gum health regardless of how well you take care of yourself.
- Stress
Research has shown that stress takes a toll on your immune system, which can make it harder for your body to fight infections like periodontal disease.
- Medications

Birth control pills, some heart medications, anti-depressants and other drugs can affect the health of your gums.

- **Teeth Clenching or Grinding**
Grinding your teeth at night or clenching when you feel stressed puts excess pressure on the periodontal tissues that support your teeth.
- **Diabetes**
As I mentioned previously, diabetics have a higher risk of developing infections – which makes them more susceptible to periodontal disease. Studies have shown that not only are diabetics more likely to have periodontal disease, but also that diabetics with periodontal disease are more likely to have a hard time controlling their diabetes.
- **Poor Nutrition and Obesity**
A diet that's low on nutritious foods deprives the body of the vitamins, minerals and proteins it needs to stay strong. This can also make it harder to fight off infections like periodontal disease.

Periodontal Disease is a Whole-Body Disease

If all this information about the damage periodontal disease isn't scary enough, let me remind you of another important fact. Periodontal disease can also affect the rest of your body. The longer periodontal disease is allowed to worsen, the greater the chance that those harmful bacteria can leave your mouth and enter your bloodstream and even your airways. These bacteria have been linked not only to cardiovascular disease, diabetes and cancer, but Alzheimer's disease, respiratory diseases, and prematurity and low birth weight in babies.

So when I treat periodontal disease, I'm really looking out for your overall health, not just your teeth and gums.

How Can You Tell If You Have Periodontal Disease?

You may have periodontal disease and not even know it; gum disease can occur in your mouth without any symptoms. It can progress slowly, and you may never feel

any pain. Some people do experience the bleeding gums or soreness and tenderness that have proven to be clear signs of gum disease, but others don't. And without pain or bleeding to tell them there's a problem, the average person won't know they have one.

Which means they'll probably let that problem get worse.

With that in mind, there are a few symptoms that can be a clear indication of gum disease. Those include:

- Bleeding during brushing or flossing your teeth
- Swollen or tender gums
- Persistent, unexplained bad breath (also called halitosis)
- Teeth that feel loose

If you are experiencing any of these symptoms, make an appointment with your dentist to have them checked out as soon as possible.

Luckily, dentists like me can now detect gum disease early, before you have symptoms, and treat it before they have a chance to develop. When you see the hygienist for your cleaning, part of your examination should include a periodontal screening to detect early signs of infection. If your gums bleed during this screening, that indicates an infection. If you catch it early, it can be treated simply and quickly. As you might expect, more advanced cases call for more extreme forms of treatment.

Treating Gum Disease

The goal in treating gum disease is to reduce the amount of harmful bacteria back to a level where your immune system can take over and keep them under control. This will restore the affected area to health, and can be accomplished fairly simply when the infection is caught early. In modern dental offices like mine, there are new technologies that not only allow dentists to treat gum disease more completely, but also do it more comfortably. Of course, if you're sensitive or nervous about treatment, you can always discuss sedation

options to make sure you can comfortably receive the treatment you need to restore your dental (and overall) health.

Non-Surgical Gum Treatments, also known as Periodontal Therapy

Since every patient is unique, your dental team will likely combine some of these procedures to come up with the best plan for you. These treatments include:

- Non-Surgical Gum Treatments

These terms describe using specialized instruments or ultrasound to remove plaque and calculus (tartar) from the surfaces of your teeth, then smoothing the tooth roots where plaque and tartar accumulate. After your teeth have been thoroughly cleaned and the bacteria removed, most offices irrigate the pockets between the teeth and gums with antibacterial or antimicrobial solutions to wash away any debris that's left behind and sterilize the area.

- Medications

Your dentist or hygienist may apply a prescription antimicrobial medicine or a time-released antibiotic directly to your gums to help kill more of the bacteria that cause periodontal disease. Your dentist may also prescribe a rinse or solution for you to use at home to keep fighting your infection.

- Laser Therapy

Many modern dental offices are discovering that using high-tech lasers to treat periodontal disease makes that treatment much more comfortable and effective. A soft tissue laser will disinfect the gum tissue pocket and seal blood vessels and nerve endings so there is no infection, bleeding, or swelling following laser treatment.

For many patients, the above treatments are all they need to control their periodontal disease, provided they follow their dentist's instructions for ongoing maintenance. To make

sure gum disease stays under control, that means removing bacteria at home every day. Your dentist and staff will give you a plan to follow at home to keep the infection from returning.

Some cases of gum disease are more advanced. In those cases, the only solution may be periodontal surgery, or gum surgery.

Even if you are a candidate for gum surgery, your dentist will likely try the non-surgical options I already talked about first. There is a chance they may work on their own, and if not, removing as much of the bacteria as possible will help ensure any surgical treatment is successful.

Periodontal Surgery will likely fall into one of four categories:

- Pocket Reduction Procedures

Gum tissue is folded back so that bacteria and damaged bone can be removed. The tissue is then secured back in place.

- Regenerative Procedures

Membranes, bone grafts and proteins that stimulate tissue growth are used to regrow healthy bone and gum tissue.

- Crown Lengthening

Removing excess gum tissue and/or bone to expose more of a tooth. This can also be used to correct a “gummy smile.”

- Soft Tissue Grafts

Used to cover roots or grow new gum tissue where tissue has receded.

Keeping your Gums Healthy

Since periodontal disease is not curable, and the bacteria involved will continue to live in your mouth, gum disease can always return -- especially if you are susceptible. The good

news is, it's also controllable. Once your in-office treatment has been completed, your dentist and his or her team will provide you with a plan to keep your gums healthy and keep periodontal disease from returning. This may mean you need to come to the office for visits on a more regular basis, and receive treatment that's a little more specialized than what you'd receive at a "normal" dental visit.

It takes around 45-90 days for the bacteria that cause gum disease to get out of control. That means you will need to stay on top of your at-home care in between office visits to make sure the infection does not come back. Be sure to brush at least two or three times a day with a soft-bristled toothbrush and floss daily. Your dentist may also prescribe antibiotic or antimicrobial treatments, an oral irrigator to wash bacteria out of your mouth, or some other home-care device. My advice: If your dentist recommends it, you should definitely make it a point to use it.

Luckily, if you're like most people, good habits and home and regular dental visits should be enough to keep gum disease in check and your smile healthy. If you happen to be one of the unlucky people whose gum disease gets out of control, get the proper treatment, follow your dentist's advice, and you should be able to control your condition – and keep your teeth – for many healthy years.

Chapter 6

RESTORATIVE DENTISTRY

Fillings, Crowns and More

Restorative Dentistry is a complicated term for the most basic type of dentistry – the fillings, crowns and other procedures dentists have been using for years to repair damaged teeth. The term comes from the fact that restorative dentistry “restores” a tooth to its previous, healthy condition.

Restorative dentistry has been around for more than 100 years, but it’s definitely changed for the better – especially over the past decade. This is why you don’t see people with a mouth full of black fillings or shiny gold crowns anymore. Today’s restoration technology is so advanced, it lets dentists like me create restorations that blend in perfectly with your real teeth, so no one (except you and me) even knows they’re there.

Now let's take a closer look at the types of restorations dentists use, and when we use them.

Fillings

Do you remember having a cavity filled when you were a child or a teenager? If so, you've already experienced restorative dentistry.

Cavities are a result of tooth decay, which happens when bacteria eat away at your tooth. The little pit they form is called a cavity, although we professionals also call them dental caries. Cavities usually don't hurt, and may not be visible to the naked eye, so more often than not, if you have a cavity, you won't know it until your next dental visit.

Taking care of a small cavity is usually not a big deal – if a third or less of your tooth structure has been damaged, your dentist will repair it with a filling. Fillings are a simple treatment that can be done in one office visit.

In general, fillings are made of either composites (tooth-colored plastic resin material) or amalgams (the old silver-colored, metal-mercury material). Many modern dentists no longer use amalgam for fillings because the newer, white fillings are much more attractive.

The filling process is simple and straightforward. First, your dentist will make sure he or she can access the tooth that needs the filling.

When you're all set up, a numbing solution will be rubbed on your gums so you won't feel the shot used to numb the area. And for those of you who have had difficulty getting numb in the past getting numb, I have some good news.

We no longer use novocaine.

Instead, modern dentists are turning to newer forms of anaesthetic that are much more effective at getting people really numb. Sometimes we even combine different

anaesthetics to create a “cocktail” that works much better than the Novocain shot you may have experienced in the past.

And if you’re afraid of needles, don’t worry – you can be sedated before a filling procedure, so you won’t feel a thing.

The anaesthetic will numb the area of your mouth where the cavity is, so you won’t feel anything when the dentist removes the tooth decay. Some dentists will even use a laser to eliminate the decayed part of your tooth. Drilling is still more common, and while some patients hate the sound (one reason why we offer sedation!), it’s still highly effective.

Once the diseased parts of your tooth are gone, the filling part of the filling starts. When I fill a tooth, I make a tooth-colored paste out of the latest, most state-of-the-art filling material to fill the drilled area. Most modern dentists use this type of tooth colored material. Then a bright, high intensity blue light will be used to harden the filling, and another drill (that you don’t feel) will shape the filling so it perfectly matches your tooth. When it’s ready, your dentist will clean the tooth, make sure it shines, take everything out of your mouth, and you’ll be ready to go.

The whole process takes about 20-30 minutes. Your mouth will still be numb from the anaesthetic, so you’ll want to be careful about eating until you can feel again. And obviously, if you’ve been sedated, you’ll want a responsible person to help you get home.

Crowns

If you have a large cavity, a large filling, cracks in a tooth, a fractured tooth, or have had a root canal, your dentist will use a crown to restore your tooth.

Back in the day, dentists used the term “crown” or “cap” to mean that the tooth being treated was completely covered by the restoration. The affected tooth was drilled down on all sides to make room for the crown material – which, way back when, was usually gold or porcelain-fused-to-metal (PFM). You might remember seeing those gold crowns in your

grandparents' mouths. Luckily, most dentists don't use them anymore. Gold is too expensive – and we now have better materials and methods available!

Until recently, making a crown was a time-consuming process. After shaving the tooth or teeth that needed to be restored, a dentist would make a mold from the tooth or teeth, make a model from the mold, and send it all to a lab to fabricate the actual crown. As you can imagine (or may have experienced), this took some time. Sometimes as long as six weeks! And while you waited, you needed to cover your shaved-down teeth with temporary restorations that looked funny and felt even worse.

More recently, it became possible to make crowns metal-free, and beautiful. That technology meant that dentists didn't always have to drill down a tooth on all sides – they only had to drill out the problem area of the tooth and replace only that area with the porcelain material. These partial crowns (which are also called inlays, onlays, or even veneers) leave much more of the healthy tooth structure intact, making them a great option when they work.

As for full crowns, the technology has also evolved – some dentists use precise computer measurement to create models of your teeth, while others still take impressions.

The first part of getting a crown is similar to the way dentists prepare a tooth for a filling. I numb the area, remove any dead or damaged tooth, and shave part of the tooth to make room for the crown. But instead of making a mold of your tooth or teeth by taking an impression, I scan it with an LED camera, and a model of your tooth will be created by a computer. This design then gets sent to a laboratory where a professional dental technician can customize your tooth by color, size, and shape. In about 2 weeks, the crown will be cemented in place, and you'll be ready to go!

Of course, you'll need some time to recover from the anesthetic and any sedation that may have been used. But beyond that, the procedure is incredibly simple.

Replacing Old Dentistry

Restorative dentistry – especially older restorative dentistry – doesn't always last forever. If you had any cavities filled when you were a child or a teenager, chances are no one told you that at some point down the line, you would need to have those same teeth filled again. However, chances are good that any filling you had done fifteen or twenty years ago is long past its expiration date.

And that means it's time to replace it.

Even if your teeth feel completely fine, there are good reasons to replace old restorations. If you have dentistry that was done prior to the 21st century, you most likely have those black/silver amalgam fillings that used to be the only filling material available.

The problem with amalgams is, they corrode over time, wearing away and weakening, and that lets bacteria sneak in. Also, the cracks and breaks at the edges of amalgam fillings can lead to cracks and breaks in teeth.

If that's not enough to convince you, look at it this way. Black fillings aren't exactly attractive – people can see them when you open your mouth to talk, laugh or eat.

So, how do you know if an old filling isn't working anymore? It's not always easy to tell. Your tooth can be decaying under a filling, and just like with a regular cavity, you may not feel a thing. Plus, since the cavity is actually hidden by the filling, you won't see a thing either.

You may have no idea anything is wrong...until you have a much bigger problem. Once you start having symptoms like a toothache or a fracture, you may need a more serious treatment than a new filling.

Luckily, the new, state-of-the art restorations not only look better, they function better too. Whether you're replacing old dentistry or getting your first crown or filling, the restorations you have done today are likely to keep your

teeth, mouth and whole body healthy (and looking great) for a long, long time.

Chapter 7

SMILE MAKEOVERS

Creating the Smile of Your Dreams through Cosmetic Dentistry

Here are a few interesting dental facts.

- 92% of people believe that an attractive smile is important to their social life.
- 75% of people believe that an attractive smile can improve their chances for success.
- 50% of people say that they are satisfied with their own smile.

That's right. Half of all people are not happy with their smile.

Maybe you're one of them.

The good news is, if you're one of those people who don't like their smile, it's never been easier to do something about it. Whether you wish your teeth were whiter, straighter, a different size or just more beautiful overall, it can happen, sometimes in as little as a single visit to your dentist's office.

The reason is cosmetic dentistry.

Today, cosmetic dentistry is transforming smiles for people all around the world – and changing their lives for the better. Thanks to new technology and incredible advances in dental care, problems our parents and grandparents had to live with can now be treated simply, easily and affordably.

The result?

A gleaming, healthy and beautiful smile is now within reach of just about everyone.

Even you.

What is Cosmetic Dentistry?

To be specific, cosmetic dentistry is a dental treatment or set of treatments performed to make the teeth and smile look better, as opposed to fixing a “medical” problem like filling a cavity or treating gum disease. The term applies to everything from simple, single-visit whitening treatments to complete “smile makeovers” involving a combination of procedures to create a perfect smile.

Just because it's called “cosmetic” and only deals with the way you look doesn't mean cosmetic dentistry isn't important. Today, because cosmetic dentistry is everywhere, white, even, well-shaped teeth have become the “new normal.” You almost never see a celebrity with less than perfect teeth. But never mind that, the number of ordinary, regular people who have crooked or discolored or otherwise bad-looking teeth is also shrinking. Teachers, construction workers, the checkout

clerk at the supermarket – it seems like everyone has a movie-star smile.

That means that, even if it sounds a little shallow, an unattractive smile can hold you back. With more people than ever sporting perfect teeth, having teeth that stand out for the wrong reasons can affect your life personally, professionally and even emotionally.

The good news is, it's never been easier to transform your teeth into a dazzling smile -- with the help of a talented, experienced cosmetic dentist.

Can Cosmetic Dentistry “Fix” Your Smile Problem?

Whatever you don't like about your teeth or smile, chances are there's a cosmetic dentistry procedure that can fix it. There are state-of-the-art treatments addressing all kinds of issues, including dull and discolored teeth, uneven or misshapen teeth, badly spaced teeth and even missing teeth.

The procedures can be very simple – many can be performed in a single office visit or two – and are available to just about anyone who is healthy enough to get to the dentist's office.

Of course, if you're pregnant, or have a chronic medical condition like diabetes, any treatment should be discussed with your dentist in advance. However, since any reputable cosmetic dentist will ask for your medical history before starting treatment, you probably don't need to worry about this.

On the whole, cosmetic dentistry is so non-invasive that it's safe for almost everyone.

Now let's take a closer look at the different cosmetic dentistry procedures that are available to you.

Whitening

If your teeth are stained, dull or darkened, there's a good chance whitening can solve the problem.

Whitening is the most common cosmetic dentistry procedure available – it’s simple and fairly inexpensive, and the results can be incredibly dramatic. It’s amazing what a difference a bright, white smile can make in your appearance. Not only will you look more attractive, you’ll also look years younger!

Most people’s teeth start out fairly white. But as they get older, they start to discolor as food, age and wear and tear wear the surface enamel down. This lets the underlying dentin, which is yellow, show through – which is why teeth tend to look more yellow as we get older.

Less enamel doesn’t just make teeth look less white, it also makes them more vulnerable to things that actually change their color -- staining from food and drinks like red wine, coffee and berries, and habits like smoking.

Teeth can also be discolored through “intrinsic staining,” which comes from the inside and is caused by exposure to drugs or too much fluoride. This type of staining is more difficult to treat with surface whitening – but it can be treated with veneers, which I’ll get to a little later.

Once you’ve decided to whiten your teeth, there are a few different options to consider.

In-office Whitening

Imagine walking into your dentist’s office with dull, dingy teeth, and walking out with a bright, dazzling, head-turning smile. In-office whitening treatments can make it happen. These quick, fairly inexpensive treatments can do an amazing amount in a short amount of time – often only a single office visit.

During treatment, your dentist or a trained assistant will apply a highly concentrated peroxide bleaching gel to the surface of your teeth. The gel will usually stay

on your teeth for a few periods of 15-20 minutes, adding up to an hour or less.

Your dentist or assistant may also use a high intensity light to activate and warm the gel, which makes the bleaching solution stronger and more effective.

If your teeth are extremely stained, you may need to return for a follow-up visit. Your dentist might also prescribe a take-home whitening system to boost the effects – or just to help them last longer and let you do “touch up” treatments at home.

The peroxide used for in-office whitening is strong, so your teeth may be sensitive after treatment. This usually goes away in a day or two, but you may want to avoid extremely cold or hot foods immediately after your treatment.

Professional take-home treatments

At home whitening tends to take longer, but it is also much gentler, making it a better option if your teeth are sensitive.

Your dentist will give you custom-fitted whitening trays to take home, along with a prescription gel that uses a lower concentration of peroxide than the “in office” variety. You’ll be shown how to fill the trays with gel, how to insert them, and how long you need to wear them. Depending on the strength of the gel, this can vary from 30 minutes to overnight.

Your teeth will whiten gradually, but the results will be very long-lasting.

Over-the-counter whitening

If you’re interested in whitening your teeth, you’ve probably seen teeth-whitening kits and devices at your local drug store.

Maybe you’ve even tried one.

If you have, you probably already know -- over-the-counter whitening is much less effective than the methods listed above. The whitening products have a much lower concentration of peroxide, and some are designed to whiten just the front teeth while ignoring the ones in the back. The effects are usually fairly minimal and don't last long.

And while they may seem like a more inexpensive option than in-office whitening, they can wind up being fairly expensive because you'll need to buy a lot of them and buy them more often to see any lasting results.

Whitening Toothpaste

Basically, all toothpaste is actually whitening toothpaste – because it all removes stains from your teeth. The word “whitening” can legally be used to refer to any treatment that makes teeth look whiter, which is why so many toothpastes claim to be “whitening” toothpaste, even if they don't contain any peroxide at all.

This is also why whitening toothpaste is the least-effective form of whitening. If you want to brighten your smile, toothpaste alone just isn't going to do the job.

Keeping your whitened teeth white

After you have professional whitening treatment, you'll probably notice your teeth are several shades whiter. Unfortunately, they won't stay quite as bright if you don't do some work to keep them that way! Of course that means regular dental care – brushing, flossing and coming in for regular cleanings and exams.

But if you can stand to skip your morning coffee or that evening glass (or two) of cabernet, you may want

to avoid dark-colored foods and drinks. At least during the first week or so.

You may also be given a “maintenance” or follow-up whitening plan. This can include at-home treatments or follow-up visits to your dentist’s office. Your dentist will tell you what maintenance you’ll need to keep your new smile bright and beautiful.

Veneers

George Clooney. Catherine Zeta-Jones. Miley Cyrus.

What do these people have in common?

If your answer is that they’re rich and famous, of course you’re right. If it’s that they’re amazingly attractive, you’re right again.

But since this is a chapter on cosmetic dentistry, they probably have something else in common, right?

The fact is, like so many other celebrities and regular, ordinary people like you and me, they have dazzling smiles that don’t come from Mother Nature.

They came from dental veneers.

Dental veneers were actually created for the very purpose of making movie stars look better on camera. They were invented in the 1930’s, in California (no surprise there!) by a dentist named Dr. Charles Pincus. Over the past 80 years, they’ve improved dramatically in terms of both technology and affordability – so today, more people than ever can sport the movie star smile they’ve always dreamed of.

And when it comes to creating that movie star smile, veneers really are amazing. They alone have the power to do what several dentistry treatments combined can do. They can transform the color of your teeth, just like whitening. They can change the

shape and look of your smile, like orthodontia. They can cover chips and cracks, like bonding. In other words, they can be used for small changes, big changes, and just about anything in between.

What are Dental Veneers?

So what exactly are these smile-transforming miracles?

Dental veneers are custom made, tooth-colored “shells” designed to fit over the surface of your natural teeth. Because they cover the entire tooth, they can be used to correct a variety of problems including chipped or cracked teeth, dullness and discoloration, wear, size issues and problems with tooth spacing, crowding, or rotations.

Veneers can be matched to any color – from the color of your natural teeth to the color you’ve always wanted your teeth to be. This makes them incredibly flexible when it comes to improving your smile. A veneer can be used to improve the look of a single tooth that has been damaged or discolored, a group of teeth, or even an entire smile -- and can produce a very dramatic change in the way your teeth look.

Types of Veneers

There are two types of veneers, each usually made of porcelain, each with different benefits.

Traditional veneers offer the most dramatic change and can be used in almost any situation – to change the color, position and/or look of just about any tooth in your mouth, or your entire smile. They are typically made to measure out of tooth-colored porcelain and fabricated in a lab.

The downside of traditional veneers – besides the need to wait for your permanent teeth to be ready -- is that they usually require part of your tooth structure to be removed by shaving or grinding it away (under

anesthesia, of course!). Meaning that once you get traditional veneers, you can never go back to your natural teeth. So if your teeth already look good and work properly, veneers might not be the right solution for you – your cosmetic dentist might want to look into other options like whitening or orthodontic treatment to give you the smile you want while allowing you to retain the teeth you have.

Some dentists also offer minimal or “no-prep” veneers that are bonded to the front of the teeth like traditional veneers, but require the removal of little to no tooth structure. They are thinner than traditional veneers and can be removed if you ever want to go back to the look of your natural teeth. They can also often be installed without anaesthesia (although if you need sedation, don’t be shy about asking your dentist for it).

The downside of “no-prep” and veneers is that they aren’t as durable as traditional veneers. Also, in many cases, they won’t work due to existing tooth position or even tooth color. Traditional veneers, on the other hand, are designed to last, and to be used in a wide range of situations. That’s why so many dentists prefer them.

If you want to change the look of your smile but don’t want to commit to veneers, there may be other options available, so check with your dentist to decide what’s best for you.

Getting Veneers – What to Expect

Getting traditional veneers will involve a few visits to your dentist’s office. During the first visit, you’ll design your smile by talking with your dentist about what you want your teeth to look like. You’ll probably look at some photos and ultimately formulate a plan, including the shape, size and color you want your new teeth to be.

Your dentist may take impressions of your smile and design your veneers on models, or, if your dentist has the right digital equipment, he may create your new smile on a computer. If this is the case, you'll be able to see what you'll look like with differently shaped or colored teeth right on the computer screen and actually choose the smile that looks best on your face!

The day you "get" your veneers, your teeth will be prepared – which means shaving away some of your tooth (or teeth) to make room for the veneers to be installed. If your veneers are being fabricated in a lab, it may take up to three weeks for them to be finished, so you may leave the office with temporary veneers. These will be very close in color and feel to your "final" veneers, so there's no need to worry about looking anything less than fabulous – in fact, the temporaries will probably be a huge improvement over what you walked in with!

Temporaries also give you an opportunity to "test drive" your new smile before you commit to your permanent veneers – so you'll have time to get used to your new look and decide if you want anything changed.

When your permanent veneers are ready, you'll have a placement appointment to "bond" them over your teeth and build your new smile. You'll look in the mirror, and chances are you'll be amazed by the transformation. You may not look like Catherine Zeta-Jones or George Clooney, but you'll almost definitely look better than you have in years!

You'll likely come back to see your dentist for at least once more appointment to make sure that everything is looking and working great.

Caring for veneers

While veneers are created to last, they're not indestructible. Just like teeth, the porcelain shells can

break, crack and chip. Your dentist will tell you if you need to be careful about what you eat -- and if you grind your teeth at night, you'll probably be advised to wear some sort of protective guard while you sleep. He or she will also recommend the best type of toothbrush and toothpaste to make sure your new smile lasts a long time.

Dental Implants

When it comes to replacing missing teeth, there is no technology more dramatic – or more effective – than dental implants.

Dental implants are not solely or strictly a cosmetic dentistry procedure. Implants perform the very medically necessary function of replacing missing or badly damaged teeth in the most effective, state-of-the-art way possible. However, since replacing a missing tooth can be part of a cosmetic dentistry plan - - and since dental implants are the most cosmetically pleasing tooth replacement technology -- I think it's important to include information about this topic here, in the cosmetic dentistry chapter.

What's so special about dental implants?

Dental implants are a huge breakthrough in tooth replacement because they're the first type of replacement that actually looks and functions almost exactly like natural teeth. To be specific, implants:

- Provide almost the same bite strength as natural teeth
- Never have to be removed
- Don't slip or wiggle or click like dentures
- Don't allow food to slip in underneath them like dentures
- Allow you to eat almost anything you like
- Actually fuse with your jawbone to become a part of your body

In fact, the only real difference between an implant and your natural teeth is...implants don't get cavities!

The technology really is amazing, and for seniors who need to replace a lot of teeth, it can also be completely life changing. People who have dental implants instead of dentures are able to eat what they want, smile, laugh and talk with confidence, and enjoy a much higher quality of life than seniors who wear dentures.

They even enjoy a higher quantity of life. Studies consistently show that seniors with dental implants live almost a full decade longer than those with missing teeth or dentures.

This is why dentists like me regard dental implants so highly. Whether you need to replace one damaged tooth or a mouthful, whether you're young or old, a dental implant really is the next best thing to magically growing a new tooth yourself.

What exactly is a dental implant?

For all their amazing, "tooth-like" qualities, an implant alone doesn't really look like a tooth at all. It looks more like a metal screw – definitely not something you would want to chew or smile with!

In fact, the "implant" part of a dental implant is really just an artificial tooth root. That root serves as a permanent base for a crown or denture that provides the visible, "tooth" part of the package.

However, while the tooth part is definitely the more important part from a cosmetic dentistry perspective – it's the part that looks natural and helps make your smile dazzling -- that little, metal tooth root is what gives dental implant technology the power to change people's lives.

The metal used to make implants, titanium, has the ability to fuse with your jawbone and actually become a part of your body. Your jawbone grows around it, which provides the benefit of not only holding the implant securely in place, but keeping the bone around it healthy. This process, called “osseointegration,” protects any natural teeth you still have in the area around your missing tooth by keeping your entire jaw strong and functional.

Of course, this is a cosmetic dentistry chapter – so let’s talk a little about the cosmetic benefits of implants.

Why do implants look so good?

The visible “tooth” part of the implant is usually a crown (if you need to replace an individual tooth) or a bridge or denture (if several missing teeth are being replaced). This is where implants can really transform the look of your smile. If you’re replacing a few “bad” teeth in an otherwise attractive smile – whether it’s the smile you were born with or the result of other cosmetic procedures -- your crowns or dentures will be designed to fit in seamlessly with your existing natural teeth, creating an overall smile that looks natural, balanced and beautiful.

If you’re replacing teeth that are (or were) too small, oddly shaped, badly-spaced, discolored or damaged, those crowns or dentures can be a huge improvement over the smile Mother Nature gave you. Your new teeth can look like anything you want, from an attractive, natural-looking grin to a dazzling movie-star smile that will turn heads. The choice is completely up to you!

The implant process

Getting dental implants does require surgery to place the implant in the jawbone.

Are you a candidate? Most people are – so chances are you are too.

The best way to determine whether or not dental implants are right for you is to have a consultation with a dentist that includes a process called cone beam computerized tomography. This is the professional term for taking a special, 3D image of your jaw that will allow your dentist to see if you are a good candidate for implants.

There are two basic types of dental implant procedures. The standard procedure is performed over a period of four to six months, depending on how long it takes the implant, or implants, to “osseointegrate,” or fuse, with the jawbone. In other cases, your dentist may perform a one-stage surgical procedure, so a second implant surgery won’t be necessary.

Which type of procedure is used depends on a few different factors, including your dentist’s specialties, the extent of the restorations you need done, the type of implants you’ll be receiving and the type of temporary prosthetic you will be using during the healing process (so you never have to face the world without teeth).

I’ll describe both types of procedures here.

The Standard Implant Procedure

A standard implant procedure involves three separate stages – preparing the jaw and placing the implants, uncovering the implants and attaching temporary crowns, and attaching permanent crowns, which is also called “loading” the implants.

During the first stage, you will be given either a sedative, local or general anesthesia, depending on your dentist and the extent of the surgery required, to make sure you won’t feel any pain or discomfort

during the procedure. So you'll want to ask if you will need a driver to take you home after your appointment – you cannot drive for 24 hours after receiving a sedative or general anesthesia.

You'll also want to wear loose, comfortable clothing so that you can fully relax during your treatment.

Your surgery will take anywhere from one hour to several hours, depending on how much work is being done. In most cases, it is performed right in the dentist's chair. Your dentist will begin by removing any teeth that are going to be replaced due to disease or damage.

Once the area has been cleared for your "new" teeth, your dentist will make tiny incisions in your gums wherever an implant is going to be inserted. Small holes will be drilled in your jawbone, and the titanium implants will be surgically placed inside and covered with protective tops called "cover screws."

Once the implants are in place, your gums will be sutured closed and left to heal while the implants fuse with your bone.

After surgery, ice will be used to reduce swelling in your jaw. Your gums will likely still be numb when you leave the office – patients are usually ready go home about half an hour after surgery. When the numbness wears off, you may feel some discomfort, so be sure to ask your dentist about your options for pain relief. You'll also be given a prescription for some kind of antibiotic to prevent infection, and a short acting steroid to help you heal more quickly.

Some cutting edge dentists also offer something called PRP therapy – a treatment top surgeons use to help professional athletes, like the L.A. Lakers' Kobe Bryant, heal after surgery. The initials "PRP" stand for platelet rich proteins -- PRP is derived from your own blood, and it concentrates the seven growth factors present in the platelets to about five times their normal level. PRP accelerates the healing process naturally by

increasing the revascularization of tissue and bone. It can also help you feel a lot better a lot faster after surgery.

You will still probably want to rest when you get home, and may need to stay off your feet for a day or two. Your dentist will give you specific instructions to follow to help you take care of your mouth to make sure you heal properly. You will be advised on dealing with any bleeding that might take place, what you can eat and when, and how to keep your mouth clean while you are healing. If you experience any problems like fever, severe pain, an increase in swelling or heavy bleeding, call your dentist right away.

Remember, it's always better to be safe than sorry – your dentist will want to know if you are having any problems. But also understand that problems like these are very rare.

After the initial surgery, you will need to wait four to six months while your implants are osseointegrated, or fused with your natural bone. In the meantime, you will be provided with some sort of temporary teeth – either a partial denture that can be removed or a semi-permanent bridge – to stand in for your missing teeth.

It might not sound like the most attractive solution, but don't worry. Most patients say their temporary teeth are already a huge improvement over their "old" smiles!

The second stage of the standard implant procedure takes place four to six months later, after your implants have fused to your jawbone and essentially become a part of you. You'll go back to your dentist and will be given a local anesthetic to numb your gums. Your dentist will then make small incisions to reveal your implants.

He or she will then remove the cover screws and attach abutments -- which will hold both the temporary and permanent crowns or dentures that

will stand in for the visible part of your teeth. The incisions will be sutured, and temporary crowns, bridges or dentures may be attached to the abutments – or you may be given a soft denture to wear while you heal.

Since this is also a surgical procedure, you may again experience some discomfort as the anesthetic wears off – although most patients don't report feeling much pain at this stage. Just like last time, your dentist will advise you on how to manage any pain you might have, how to help your mouth heal and how to keep it clean, and what you can eat – and how soon. Recovery should be much faster and simpler than recovery from Stage 1, but you should still be sure to follow your dentist's instructions closely to make sure everything is perfect for the next stage. Because that next stage is the really exciting part.

The final stage – called the Restoration Phase -- takes place a few weeks later. Your dentist will take impressions or a digital picture of your jaw, including your abutments, to help make the permanent crowns, bridges or dentures that will soon be your new, permanent teeth. The impression will be sent to a lab where a model will be made of the inside of your mouth. That model will be used to create replacement teeth that will look and feel just like natural teeth and give you the dazzling new smile – and all the extras that come with it – that you've been waiting for!

When your new teeth are ready, you'll go back to your dentist for the big moment – what is called “loading” the implants (which basically means attaching your new, permanent teeth to the abutments). Your dentist will make sure your new teeth blend in and fit perfectly with your natural teeth.

And you'll be ready for a lifetime of more comfortable eating, talking and most of all, smiling.

The One-Stage Implant Procedure

In some cases, the surgery part of your implant procedure can be taken care of in a single visit, so you will only need to be anesthetized (and recover) once. This is called a one-stage surgical procedure.

There are two major differences between a one-stage procedure and a standard procedure. The first is that in a one-stage procedure, the implants and abutments are placed in your mouth at the same time rather than during two separate surgeries. To make sure your gums don't grow back over the implants during healing, small caps called "healing caps" are placed over each implant.

The second major difference is that while osseointegration is taking place and your implants are fusing to your jawbone, you may not wear a temporary denture, and if you do, it will probably be loose and removable. This is why dentists tend to use the one-stage implant procedure in the back of your mouth where your teeth won't be seen, or to replace a single tooth.

The recovery after a one-stage implant procedure is a lot like recovery from the first stage of a standard procedure. Your dentists will tell you what to do regarding pain management, eating, cleaning and healing, and it will still take months for your implants to fuse with your jawbone and become a permanent, nearly-natural part of YOU.

Teeth in a Day – Immediately Loaded Implants

Imagine walking into your implant doctor's office and walking out with teeth.

Believe it or not, it is possible, with what we dentists call immediately loaded implants. Thanks to recent advances in implant technology, many implant

patients are now able to get their new smiles in a single office visit.

The technique works best on patients who have enough bone remaining to support the implant immediately, and is a great choice for someone who needs to have a single tooth removed and wants a new one right away.

Many implant dentists perform some version of the “teeth-in-a-day” procedure, so be sure to ask yours if he or she performs the technique, and if it will work for you. For many implant patients, immediately loaded implants are extremely effective.

Of course, like any implant, immediately loaded implants still need several months of gentle care while osseointegration takes place, and there will also probably be a wait for permanent crowns or other tooth replacements. The primary advantage is that you’ll never, ever need to worry about facing the world without teeth again – even for a minute. And since that’s why you’re getting implants in the first place, there’s nothing more exciting than getting that result in a single visit.

Whatever method is ultimately best for you, the end result will be the same. Within a few months, you will have beautiful, permanent teeth firmly rooted in your jaw. Any bone loss you are suffering will be stopped. You will be able to eat what you want, do what you want and talk without embarrassment.

And of course, you’ll have the smile of your dreams. And you’ll be smiling that smile for the rest of your life.

I should let you know that dental implants aren’t the right solution for everyone. Because the jawbone supports the implant, you need to have enough healthy bone there to support it, or additional procedures like bone grafting may be used to add more bone where it’s needed. However, the vast

majority of people who want implants will turn out to be good candidates for the technology.

Once the implants are installed, the success rate is incredible – over 95% with natural bone and 85-90% with grafted bone. Your dentist will be able to tell if implants are a good option for you. So if replacing missing or non-functioning teeth is a part of your smile makeover, I highly recommend considering dental implants for the job.

Dentures

Many dentists, including me, frequently use dentures in combination with dental implants to restore patients' smiles. However, some people's only or best option for tooth replacement still may be traditional dentures – the type that are not attached to dental implants.

If that is the case for you, you don't need to worry that new dental technologies are passing you by. Because dentures have also improved dramatically over the past few years.

These new dentures, known as “facelift dentures,” are designed not only to stand in for missing teeth, but to support the structure of your face. Facelift dentures also stimulate your jawbone to prevent the bone loss and deterioration that leads to that “old age” look.

Because the jawbone does not deteriorate, the fit of these newer, better dentures remains snug, meaning they don't slip as easily as traditional dentures and allow you to eat more of the foods you love.

Facelift dentures don't just address the chewing function of your teeth and jaws, they also restore parts of the face that may have already been lost due to bone loss. Facelift dentures can re-build your profile, lips and overall facial structure and continue to support that structure as you age.

When installing these dentures, dentists focus on your jaw muscles, making sure they are able to relax normally and function properly with the denture in place. Your bite is built at the exact position that will provide the best fit and function – meaning you will likely be able to eat a full range of foods again. Plus, since this position also provides the most facial support, you can also expect to look younger and better than patients who wear ordinary dentures.

Because detailed measurements are necessary to design a facelift denture, they take much more expertise and time. You may need to come in to see the dentist more often, and you may pay a higher price than you would for traditional dentures. However, since the fit, function, and look of facelift dentures is so much better, many dentists recommend them to their patients who, for health reasons or reasons of cost, are not good candidates for dental implants.

Whether your smile makeover includes just one of these technologies, or several technologies used together in combination, cosmetic dentistry has the power to change not only the way you look, but the way you feel. If you've been thinking about transforming your smile into the smile of your dreams, there's really never been a better time. So let your dentist know that you've been thinking about a smile makeover, and find out what he or she can do for you.

Even if you're one of those patients who is afraid of the dentist, many dentists, including me, offer sedation with cosmetic procedures, so anyone can be comfortable turning their ordinary teeth into a superstar smile.

You might be surprised to learn how simple and affordable getting that smile can be.

And the best news is, you'll get to enjoy it for the rest of your life

Chapter 8

STRAIGHTENING TEETH

The Evolution of Orthodontics

In the last chapter, I talked about how cosmetic dentistry procedures like whitening, dental implants and dental veneers can completely transform they appearance of your smile.

However, there are times when the “quick fix” of cosmetic dentistry isn’t the best way to go – usually when you have nicely colored, nicely shaped, healthy teeth that just happen to be in the wrong place in your mouth.

When this happens – when otherwise beautiful teeth are unevenly spaced, crowded or crooked, orthodontics – or braces -- offer the best solution. The reason? They bring teeth into alignment without changing the structure of the actual tooth in any way, meaning that tooth can stay strong, healthy and beautiful for years to come.

Don't Fear the B-Word!

When you hear the word “braces,” your mind might automatically flash back to childhood, and images of metal-mouthed 12-year-olds enduring taunts of “brace face.” Maybe you were that 12-year-old, in which case you might be shocked to learn that you need braces now. The reality is, teeth tend to shift over time. As we get older, teeth can drift back into their old, “pre-braces” locations, or even migrate into entirely new territory. This can happen if you wore braces or if you never wore braces at all, it's just a fact of life.

But fear not. Orthodontic treatment is not nearly as scary as is used to be.

True, orthodontics are still not a quick fix. While many of today's new orthodontic technologies work much faster than those old fashioned braces did, you still won't walk into your dentist's office and walk out a few hours later with a perfect smile. Moving teeth into perfect alignment is a process that can take months, and, in some cases, a year or two.

However, like so many of the other dental technologies and techniques I've talked about in this book, orthodontic technology has changed dramatically since back when you were in middle school (or junior high, if that's what it was called in your town). In fact, today you may be able to straighten your teeth with braces without anyone knowing but you and your dentist.

It all depends on which type of braces you decide on.

Traditional Braces

If you wore braces when you were a kid, chances are good they were what we now call traditional braces. Those are the metal brackets that are cemented to the front of your teeth and hold a wire that is tightened gradually to shift your teeth into position over time.

Even this most basic type of orthodontic technology has changed – today, most dentists also offer clear or white

porcelain brackets, which make them less visible. You can even ask for colored brackets, if you feel like making a style statement. But most adults choose the hard-to-see variety over the wild and crazy type.

Traditional braces will require several steps. Your dentist will take x-rays of your teeth, and either take impressions (where you bite down into a tray of gooey material) or use a computer to create a model of your teeth as they are right now. Then he or she will and formulate a plan to shift them to where they should be.

You'll need to come in again to have your brackets installed, along with the wire that does the actual work of moving your teeth. This may feel a little uncomfortable – the wire will be pushing or pulling your teeth into position, so there will be pressure in your mouth as your teeth start to shift. It's perfectly okay to take an over-the-counter painkiller until you get used to the sensation.

You'll need to come back to your dentist's office periodically to have your wires tightened and your progress checked as your new smile takes shape. The entire process usually lasts from 1-2 years, after which you'll likely need to wear some sort of retainer to protect your beautiful, straight smile!

Lingual Braces

These braces keep the brackets out of view by placing them on the backside of teeth – so people may notice your braces when you talk or eat, but not when you smile. Also called incognito braces, they move teeth in a similar way to traditional braces, with a wire running through the brackets that is gradually tightened. These are not especially common, as there are other, simpler, more discreet alternatives that I'll talk about now.

Invisalign®

When it comes to new technology that has changed the way we dentists straighten teeth, Invisalign® (and

other clear, plastic aligners) are basically the gold standard.

Invisalign® allows you to straighten your teeth almost invisibly, without anyone knowing but you and your dentist. Instead of brackets and wires, the technology consists of clear, plastic, removable aligners that are designed to gradually move your teeth into the right position. You wear each aligner for around two weeks, removing it to eat, brush your teeth and for the occasional special event. Then you throw it away and move on to the next in the series.

Each aligner moves your teeth closer to where you (and your dentist!) want them to be, so you can start to actually enjoy your new smile before your treatment is complete. Your actual treatment time will depend on your individual case, but the average time for most adults is about 12 months. During that time, you'll only need to come in for check-ups every 6-8 weeks.

And the price? It's about the same as traditional braces.

Invisalign® can be used to treat most orthodontic problems, including overbite, underbite, crossbite, crowding and gaps between teeth. Like traditional braces, they can be uncomfortable – moving teeth from one place to another isn't always pain-free for everyone. However, many people feel that the smooth, plastic aligners are much easier to live with than brackets and wires that poke or stick.

Why Invisalign®?

The fact is, there are tons of amazing things about Invisalign® that make them an ideal choice for adult patients, and even teens who would prefer not to sport that “metal mouth” look. Here are just a few of the advantages of choosing Invisalign® over traditional, metal braces.

	Metal Braces	Invisalign®
Is effective in treating most orthodontic problems	yes	yes
Straightens teeth	yes	yes
Price comparable to traditional braces	yes	yes
12 month average treatment time	no	yes
Includes metal wires and brackets that poke	yes	no
Made of smooth, comfortable plastic	no	yes
Allows you to eat anything you want	no	yes
Removable for cleaning, eating and special events		noyes
Is almost invisible and totally discreet	no	yes
Does not get in the way of brushing or flossing	no	yes
Office visits only every 6-8 weeks	no	yes

Will Invisalign® Work for You?

Still, you may be wondering if Invisalign® is right for you. You've probably heard the expression, "If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is." Happily, this is not the case with Invisalign®. Years of research and millions of happy patients have proven that this new technology really does work. Will it work on you? Here's a list of the orthodontic issues that have been solved by Invisalign®:

1. Widely Spaced or Missing Teeth

Visible gaps between your teeth aren't just unattractive; they also make you more susceptible to periodontal disease. Invisalign® can close those gaps and give you a beautiful, healthy smile.

2. Crowded Teeth

When there's not enough room in your jaw for all of your teeth, they cross over each other, making cleaning between teeth a challenge. Invisalign® aligners guide each tooth into its own space, straightening your entire smile and making it easier to take care of.

3. Crossbite

Crossbite occurs when your jaws are out of alignment, and can lead to serious wear and tear on your teeth. Invisalign® can ease your teeth back into alignment, relieving stress and giving you a better-looking smile.

4. Underbite

When your bottom teeth protrude past your front teeth, it's not just unattractive, it can actually cause jaw pain. Invisalign® aligners shift your teeth into the proper position, which won't just give you a beautiful smile; it will also ease the pressure on your jaw.

5. Overbite

Not only do those “bunny teeth” look funny, the fact that they stick out also makes them susceptible to chipping and cracking. Improving the look of your smile with Invisalign® aligners will help protect your all-important front teeth from damage.

The fact is, over 1.5 million people have been treated with Invisalign® aligners – and since 96% of those patients say they're satisfied with the results, chances are Invisalign® will work for you.

So if you're thinking about straightening your teeth, but don't want to deal with the “metal mouth” look of braces, ask your dentist if Invisalign® or other clear aligners will work for you.

Chapter 9

SNORING AND SLEEP APNEA

The Not-So-Silent Epidemic

You're snuggled underneath your covers, totally at peace, experiencing the most incredible dream. In the dream, you're lying in the warm sun on a beautiful beach. You feel the breeze rustling through your hair. You smell the salt air. You hear the waves crashing again, and again, and again. You're about to reach for that coconut shell filled with some delicious, tropical beverage with an umbrella in it when you feel something (or someone) shove you and hear a voice yell...

"You're snoring again!"

You open your eyes and look around. You're not on the beach. You're in bed. With a very angry person next to you.

But you couldn't have been snoring. You would have heard something, right?

Then again, those waves in your dream were crashing pretty loudly...

So here's my question. Does this happen to you a lot? Does your wife or husband or partner or child make jokes that involve you sounding like a buzz saw at night? Has the person who normally shares a bed with you started wearing earplugs, or moved to the couch in the TV room?

Or was there ever a time when you snored loud enough to wake yourself up?

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, you may suffer from sleep apnea. And you won't be alone. Some studies estimate up to 22 million Americans have it too.

The problem is, if you have this incredibly common condition, your snoring isn't just annoying the person next to you in bed, or in the next room. It could be hazardous to your health.

I know, this might sound completely crazy. In our society, snoring is something we laugh at. Watch a comedy movie or cartoon on TV that involves sleep, and chances are someone will be snoring. But in reality, sleep apnea is not funny. And if you're suffering from it, night after night, it could even be dangerous. Or deadly.

Why I'm writing about Sleep Apnea

You might be surprised to see a whole chapter about snoring in a book written by a dentist. After all, sleep apnea sounds like a medical problem, not a dental problem, right?

In fact, sleep apnea does affect dental health. It has been shown to cause wear and tear on your teeth and even your jaw joints. In fact, many patients with TMJ problems also suffer from sleep apnea.

But there's an even bigger reason why I've included sleep apnea in this book: a lot of the most effective treatments for sleep apnea are actually performed by dentists like me. It's

another way dentists don't just keep your mouth healthy, but help keep your entire body in top form.

Because if you're suffering from sleep apnea, your body definitely needs some help.

What is Sleep Apnea?

Sleep apnea is a condition that causes you to stop breathing for 10 to 30 seconds at frequent intervals, all night long, while you sleep. If you suffer from sleep apnea you may stop breathing like this hundreds of times every night. And every single time you stop breathing, you deprive your body of oxygen.

Of course, since you're sleeping, you probably have no idea this is happening.

This "not knowing" can be really dangerous. Depriving your body of oxygen over and over, night after night has been linked to long-term effects including weight gain, diabetes, high blood pressure, kidney failure, stroke and heart failure.

At the same time, the exhaustion that comes from not sleeping deeply through the night has been linked to an increased number of car accidents – an amazing five times more among sleep apnea sufferers!

See – I told you sleep apnea can be deadly.

Sleep apnea can affect anyone from children to seniors; however, you're most likely to suffer from it if you're male, over 40 and overweight. It can be caused by a variety of factors, including:

- Allergies
- Large tonsils and/or adenoids
- Genetics
- Enlarged tongue
- Poor Posture (either while awake or during sleep)
- The upper and lower jaws not being properly aligned

All of these conditions can lead to the same result -- a person sleeping with their mouth open in a position that doesn't keep their airway open. Excess fat, the soft palate, tonsils, adenoids or the uvula can also block the airway and cause you to briefly stop breathing, over and over.

Symptoms of Sleep Apnea

Obviously, the most common symptom of sleep apnea is that loud snoring your bed-mate or roommate complains about. Some sleep apnea sufferers also make choking sounds while they sleep. But there are other people who have sleep apnea, but show absolutely with no symptoms. And, of course, even if there are symptoms, you're probably asleep when they occur, so chances are you're completely unaware of them, especially if you sleep or live alone.

So if you sleep through your symptoms, how do you know if you have sleep apnea? Well, if you've been told you snore, that's definitely a big clue. If you have unexplained trouble sleeping, feel tired during the daytime or suffer from headaches when you wake up in the morning, those could also be a sign that something is wrong with your sleep.

A sleep quiz is one quick way to determine if you might have sleep apnea. One popular test is The Epworth Sleepiness Scale, which I'm going to include right here.

The Epworth Sleepiness Scale

Rate how likely you are, from 0 being not at all likely to 3 being extremely likely, to fall asleep during the following situations:

- Sitting and reading
- Watching TV
- Sitting inactive in a public place (like a movie theater or a meeting)
- As a passenger in a car for an hour without a break
- Lying down to rest in the afternoon
- Sitting and talking to someone
- Sitting quietly after a lunch where you didn't drink alcohol

-
- In a car, while stopped for a few minutes in traffic

If your score is high, that's a good sign that you should probably be evaluated for sleep apnea (unless there is something else in your life, like a new baby or a sick child or unusual stress, that's preventing you from sleeping).

Treating Sleep Apnea

Once it has been determined that you do have sleep apnea, the next step is, of course, to treat it. There are several methods that have been used over the years – some more effective than others.

Sometimes, the first step is what we call “behavioral changes,” like losing weight or quitting smoking. These can definitely help. But in more cases than you might expect, the sleep apnea doesn't go away.

If you ask your doctor to help with your sleep apnea, chances are he or she will prescribe what is called a Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (or CPAP) machine. You may have seen this scary-looking machine before. Patients have to wear a mask that blows air into their airway to keep it open while they sleep.

As you might imagine, some people find this a bit uncomfortable.

This is where your humble dentist can be extremely helpful. The oral appliances we use to treat sleep apnea by adjusting your bite have proven to be a very effective – and less invasive -- alternative.

These appliances, work to keep your airway open by repositioning your jaw or tongue. They can even be used to retrain you to breathe differently while you sleep, which basically cures your sleep apnea once and for all.

Devices like these are usually fitted by your dentist specifically to suit your case and condition. The fitting doesn't take long and isn't complicated – however, that doesn't mean seeing the dentist is not an important part of the process.

In other words, beware of those generic “anti-snoring” devices you can buy online or at the store, or see advertised on TV.

When it comes to your health, you get what you pay for – since those appliances are not designed specifically for you, they’re not really going to do much to address the specific problems behind your sleep apnea. Even worse, some of these devices can actually stop your snoring, but do nothing about your sleep apnea, which is even more dangerous than doing nothing since you’ll think everything is fine.

In the most extreme cases, oral surgery can be a good option for curing sleep apnea, including some procedures that can be performed with lasers. For some other patients, the only real solution will be medical, and could include having their tonsils and adenoids removed.

The important thing to remember is, there’s no real way of knowing what the best treatment option is for your sleep apnea until you actually know that you have sleep apnea. That means having the condition diagnosed by a professional and figuring out what’s causing it. And an appointment with your dentist is a great place to start.

The sleep apnea treatments dentists provide are much less invasive and a whole lot easier to live with than those scary breathing machines you may wind up with if you start at the doctor’s office. If it turns out that you’re one of the few people that really needs a medical solution, your dentist will help you find a specialist that works with cases like yours. However, chances are, if you have sleep apnea, I can help you get rid of it with treatments that are simple and painless. And that should help you – and anyone who lives with you – sleep a whole lot easier.

Chapter 10

C O N C L U S I O N

How to Take Care of Your Teeth

If you follow the advice in this book, chances are good you'll end up with the kind of healthy, attractive smile you can be proud of. The kind of smile you'll feel confident showing off to the world.

So...how do you make sure it stays that way?

A good dentist will do everything in his or her power to get your smile healthy and beautiful. My team and I will keep your mouth clean and try to spot problems early, before they develop into bigger issues. We'll treat gum disease with the most modern, state-of-the-art tools and techniques, fill cavities and repair damaged teeth with beautiful, natural-looking restorations, and use up-to-the-minute cosmetic dentistry and orthodontic techniques to give you a smile that stands out in a crowd.

The rest, however, is up to you.

And as you might expect, that means starting with proper dental care.

It means brushing at least twice a day, and possibly more, depending on any issues you may have had with your teeth or your health, especially gum disease or diabetes, as well as the type of work you've had done on your teeth.

It means flossing every day – no excuses! There are so many types of dental floss out there – waxed, unwaxed, flavored, plain -- I'm confident you can find one that you won't mind using.

It means seeing your dentist as often as he or she recommends for regular checkups, cleanings and any necessary maintenance, to keep restorations in good shape or to stay on top of conditions like periodontal disease.

So yes, that may mean more than two visits a year.

It could also mean making some slight changes to the way you've taken care of your teeth in the past – even if you've always taken excellent care of your teeth -- if your smile includes any restorations or veneers.

Why would dental restorations mean a change in your dental care routine? The materials we use for dental restorations may be designed to look just like natural teeth, but that doesn't mean they wear just like natural teeth. So don't let their amazingly natural, tooth-like appearance fool you! Many dental restorations need extra care, which means protecting your investment in your dazzling new smile could include adding some twists to your daily routine.

To get a little more specific, most modern restorations are made of a bonded composite resin, porcelain, or some combination of both materials. Of course these materials aren't just chosen because they look great – they're designed to be durable. However, they can still stain, chip, or even break. In fact, your natural teeth can too. So to prevent that from happening, and to take the best possible care of all of

your teeth, real and manufactured, you will want to keep this list of Do's and Don'ts in mind.

Dental Care Do's and Don'ts

DO – Attack Plaque

Controlling the level of plaque on your teeth (both the teeth you were born with and any restorations) is essential to keeping your smile healthy. That means regular brushing and flossing is a must. Plaque can not only destroy your natural teeth, it can also wreak havoc on the materials used in dental restorations, making them porous, which means they will soak up substances like red wine or berry juice and stain more easily.

Plaque can also cause gums to recede, which isn't just unhealthy for your mouth and body (as I've already explained). It can also expose parts of your teeth that might be a different color than, say, a gleaming white veneer!

The fact is, patients who let plaque get out of control will often need to replace some fillings and veneers more often than patients who keep plaque in check. And, of course, they're more likely to suffer from the kinds of problems that will lead to more dental visits, rather than less.

When you brush away that plaque, pay special attention to the area between where any dental work stops and any natural tooth or gum begins. This area is probably the most susceptible to bacteria – the tiny spaces are ideal places for them to “set up camp.” And you don't want any bacteria enjoying a camping trip in your mouth.

DON'T – Chew Extremely Hard Things

Maybe you love nothing more than crunching down on a refreshing, but rock-hard, ice cube. Or maybe you're one of those people who rely on their teeth to tear those hard-to-open plastic packages, or bite down on pins or staples. Maybe

you have a nervous habit like biting your nails or chewing pencils.

If you do, and you want to take the best possible care of your teeth, now is probably a good time to stop.

Habits are hard to break, I know. But habits like these can be bad for your teeth, and they're even worse for dental restorations. They can cause teeth to chip, crack or break, and if you've just invested a lot of time and money in a beautiful new smile, one bad bite can ruin that investment really, really fast.

Eating normal foods that require you to bite into them -- like bagels, apples and corn on the cob -- should be fine. That's what your teeth, and any restorations, are designed to do. So please understand, I'm not saying that you should build a fortress around your mouth and only let the mushy foods in. I'm saying that you should use common sense when it comes to biting and chewing things that aren't food.

That's the best way to take care of your beautiful smile.

DO – Whatever It Takes To Stop Grinding Your Teeth

Tooth grinding is more than just an annoying habit – it's also destroying your teeth, little by little. The constant pressure grinding puts on your teeth, or on any new restorations like veneers, can cause them to chip, crack or break. So if you know you grind your teeth, or if your dentist has pointed it out to you, ask about a night guard – and wear it! Your teeth and your restorations will thank you.

DON'T – Drink Alcohol to Excess

This “don't” surprises a lot of people – after all, what does enjoying a few adults-only beverages have to do with your teeth? The key here is how many drinks add up to a few – and whether or not your smile includes any restorations. Having several drinks a day actually can irritate your gum tissues and dry out your mouth – both of which can lead to breakdown of your teeth, gums and dental restorations. . Like

most things in life, use common sense, and you should be fine.

DO – See Your Dentist Regularly

I know I touched on this earlier, but it's so important that I can't leave it off this list. Because, for many patients, the old "twice a year" rule just isn't enough. Crowns, veneers and other restorations can sometimes benefit from extra maintenance outside the home, like polishing to keep your smile at its whitest and shiniest.

Mouths that have been treated for diseases like periodontitis can also benefit from extra examinations and cleanings, to make sure the bacteria don't get out of control again. Your dentist will know what's best for you and your smile, so be sure to talk about the right plan to keep that smile healthy and beautiful for the long term.

It should also go without saying that if you experience any unexpected problems with a restoration, periodontal disease or anything mouth or tooth-related, let your dentist know as soon as possible. Early intervention is the best way to make sure little problems don't turn into big ones.

DON'T – Forget to Wear a Prescribed Appliance

Whether we're talking about the Invisalign® aligners you've invested in to straighten your teeth or the anti-snoring appliance designed to cure your sleep apnea, these devices can't do their job unless you actually wear them! It might sound silly, but you'd be surprised at the number of patients who invest in the latest, most state-of-the-art solutions for their dental problems...and then leave them sitting in the drawer of their nightstand.

Which means the problems don't go away – and their money does.

The moral of the story is, if you've been prescribed an appliance of any kind; don't forget that wearing it outside the dentist's office is an essential part of your treatment and maintenance routine. Protect your investment and leave

notes around the house, or program your phone or computer to remind you, or do whatever it takes to make sure you use your appliances according to the schedule your dentist gives you.

You'll enjoy your beautiful smile a lot faster, and/or for a lot longer.

DO – Wear a Mouth Guard If You Play Sports

Yes, I know, a mouth guard may not look particularly attractive. But if you regularly play any contact sports, a mouth guard can keep what's hidden underneath it (your teeth) safe from balls, or elbows, or hockey pucks or whatever other tooth-damaging items might head your way in the course of a game. I've made this costly mistake personally, and now have two "false" front teeth to show for it. Wear a mouthguard!

That will keep your smile attractive, not to mention healthy and functional, and keep you in the game a whole lot longer.

DON'T – Eat Between Meals

Your mother was right. Snacking between meals is unhealthy – especially when it comes to your teeth. Scientific studies actually show that people who nibble on snacks all day long aren't just consuming too many calories; they're also constantly exposing their teeth to bacteria, even if they brush and floss regularly. Because the minute they eat again, the bacteria come back.

If you really need to snack – and we all do sometimes -- try to limit it to a few times a day, and remember to at least rinse your mouth with water afterwards.

DO – Chew Gum

Then again, maybe mom was also wrong.

You might be surprised to a dentist say that chewing gum is good for your teeth. Or maybe you've seen those

commercials that say “4 out of 5 dentists” recommend a specific type of gum? We actually do.

Of course, I’m not talking about just any gum – I’m strictly talking about the sugar-free variety. However, that kind of gum really is beneficial to your dental health. When you chew gum, it stimulates your saliva, which is the natural way your mouth keeps your teeth clean.

So chew away. Just don’t swallow it when you’re done.

DO Brush – But DON’T Brush Too Hard!

You probably already know that one of the most important things you can do to care for your teeth is to brush them at least twice a day (and floss once a day). What you might not know is that when it comes to brushing, you can overdo it -- especially if you have restorations like bonding, implants or veneers.

One way to make sure your tooth-brushing is strictly beneficial is to choose the right toothbrush for the job. Always – and I mean always -- choose a soft-bristled brush. Essentially all dentists and dental association’s recommend them, and I still find it strange that manufacturers even make other kinds of brushes. Those hard brushes aren’t really good for natural teeth, and are especially hard on dental restorations.

If you’re not sure which brush is best, look at the toothbrush your dentist sends home with you, and when it comes time to replace it (most dentists say every three months), buy another exactly like it.

The right toothpaste is also important. If you have restorations, you need to take special care to avoid what we call abrasion. Unfortunately, abrasion is what so-called “whitening” toothpastes use to remove stains from your teeth. It also scratches and eventually dulls the porcelain used in some veneers and crowns. So if you have restorations, skip those toothpastes that identify themselves as “whitening.” If not, use common sense, and be sure to

choose a toothpaste from a reputable brand that's approved by the American Dental Association (ADA).

Again, if your dentist sends you home with a tube of toothpaste, the kind he or she gives you is probably right for you and your new smile. If you have any questions about buying your own toothpaste, someone at your dentist's office should be able to guide you toward the right choice.

DON'T – Trust Your Care to Just Any Dentist

You probably wouldn't have read this entire book if you didn't already know – your smile is very important. A beautiful, healthy smile doesn't just affect your appearance; it can affect your self-esteem, your social life, and even your career. So it only makes sense that you should protect your smile by trusting its care and maintenance to the best, most qualified team possible.

That means not just a great dentist, but hygienists and staff who understand your teeth and gums. You want to be sure everyone who deals with your dental health understands any conditions you might have and any work you might have had done, to keep your mouth at its healthiest and any restorations looking their best.

Remember, your smile is the only one you've got – and whether it's naturally beautiful or got that way with a little help from your dentist, you want it to stay that way. So it makes sense to do everything you can to take care of it, both at home and professionally.

Follow the tips in this chapter, and in the rest of this book, and you should be enjoying your beautiful, healthy, functional smile for many years to come.