

Improving your smile with dental veneers

Many patients are discovering the benefits of dental veneers. Unlike a crown, which covers the entire tooth, a veneer is a thin covering that is placed over the front (visible) part of the tooth. The dentist applies veneers in a simple, comfortable procedure that takes just a few visits.

Veneers are a popular treatment option for several reasons. They generally are placed on upper front teeth that are severely discolored, poorly shaped or slightly crooked. Veneers may be used to lighten front teeth that are naturally yellow or have a gray cast and cannot be whitened by bleaching. Veneers are sometimes used to correct teeth that are chipped or worn. They also may be used to correct uneven spaces or a diastema (a large, noticeable gap between the upper front teeth).

TYPES OF VENEERS

There are two types of veneers: ceramic veneers (sometimes called laminates) and resin-based composite veneers.

Ceramic veneers. Ceramic veneers are extremely thin shells made of a strong and durable dental ceramic. The dentist removes a small amount of enamel from the front and sides of the tooth. This makes room for the veneer and prevents the restored tooth from feeling or looking bulky or unnatural.

Next, the dentist makes an impression of the prepared teeth so that the shape of the preparations and surrounding teeth can be replicated in the dental laboratory. The dentist also looks for the shade that will best match or blend with the other teeth. The impressions are sent to a dental laboratory that makes the ceramic veneers to fit your individual teeth. This may take several days.

At the next visit, the dentist places the veneers on the teeth to check the fit and shape. After any

adjustments, the teeth are cleaned and the ceramic veneers are bonded to the teeth with dental cement. Further adjustments may be done at a subsequent appointment.

Resin-based composite veneers. Resin-based composite veneers generally are placed in one appointment. After the tooth is prepared or reshaped, the dentist carefully bonds and sculpts the composite material in a color that matches your other teeth. A special light is used to harden the composite. The veneer is smoothed and polished to look like a natural tooth.

CHOOSING VENEERS: CONSIDERATIONS

Teeth must be healthy and free of decay and active periodontal disease. Veneers typically require less removal of tooth enamel than do crowns. However, the process is not reversible once the enamel is removed.

Patients who clench or grind their teeth are not good candidates for veneers, because the thin veneers may chip, break or peel. Avoid biting your fingernails and chewing on hard objects, such as pencils or ice. Like any dental restoration, veneers can be dislodged over time and with wear. In that case, new ones might be needed. As with all your dental care, discuss your expectations and treatment options thoroughly with your dentist.

No special maintenance is needed other than good oral hygiene each day. Look for oral hygiene products that display the American Dental Association's Seal of Acceptance. Brush twice a day with fluoride toothpaste and clean between your teeth once a day with floss or another interdental cleaner.

Regular dental visits are a must for maintaining healthy teeth. ■

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