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HEALTH

Dental Veneers: Everything You Need To Know



Your smile is one of the first things people notice about you—that’s why so many people want to make theirs look great. Dental veneers, or thin layers of material placed over the front of the tooth, can improve the overall appearance of your teeth.

If you’ve ever considered veneers, keep reading to learn everything you need to know about this simple dental procedure, including the benefits, potential drawbacks and cost.

What Are Dental Veneers?

“Veneers are a thin, custom-made tooth-like shell designed to cover the front surface of your teeth to improve your smile,” says Alex Rubinov, D.D.S., a New York-based cosmetic dentist.

Veneers can be made from porcelain or resin composite materials. Both materials work well, but according to Dr. Rubinov, porcelain veneers are touted for being a long-lasting solution to tooth issues, and have the added benefit of being very similar to natural teeth when it comes to opacity (in other words, the way light permeates porcelain veneers very closely matches the way light permeates natural teeth). Resin, on the other hand, simply isn’t as strong a material.

“Resin veneers are more likely to stain, chip and accumulate plaque than porcelain veneers are,” he says. “This commonly leads to decay beneath the resin veneer, ultimately compromising the tooth more significantly in the long run.”

“Porcelain veneers not only give you limitless freedom to improve tooth color, but also the shape of the tooth and overall oral aesthetic. With porcelain veneers, you never have to worry about staining or changing color over time,” says Dr. Rubinov.

Who Needs Dental Veneers?

In most cases, patients who seek veneers want to improve the aesthetic of their smile, says Dr. Rubinov. Unlike fillings and crowns, they aren't necessarily medically needed, but can act as a cosmetic solution and vastly improve a variety of conditions that occur over time to diminish your smile.

Here are some of the most common reasons people ask for veneers, according to Dr. Rubinov:

- To enhance the brightness of their smile
- To correct discoloration
- To fix fractures or chips
- To close gaps
- To correct small misalignments
- To replace old fillings

How Does the Dental Veneers Procedure Work?

Having dental veneers put on is a relatively simple procedure performed in your dentist's office. However, you may need to make a few appointments to complete the entire process, says Samantha Rawdin, D.M.D., a prosthodontist based in New York. Typically, you'll have a consultation, then a follow-up or two for fitting and applying. Below is a breakdown of the steps involved:

Initial Consultation

"The first step for diagnosis involves an intimate consultation between the dentist and patient," says Dr. Rubinov. "I always ask my patients to explain to me in detail the insecurity they have with their smile. "This helps me come up with a plan that produces the result that they are trying to achieve."

The initial appointment will likely involve a physical exam to assess your overall oral hygiene, spot any issues (like excessive tooth decay) before veneers are applied and discuss your goals, says Dr. Rawdin. "You should also expect to have X-rays and photos taken, and possibly even impressions of your teeth," she says.

Preparing Your Teeth

Once both you and your dentist have decided you're a good candidate for veneers, your dentist will prepare your teeth. This can involve fixing cavities, reshaping the surface of your teeth and "roughing" the enamel to help the cement adhere better, says Dr. Rubinov.

Fitting and Bonding the Veneers

Once your custom veneers come back from the lab, which Dr. Rawdin says can take several weeks, you'll go in for a fitting appointment. Here, your dentist will test the size, color and overall appearance. If everything looks and feels right, your veneers will be bonded right away. If not, your veneers may need to be sent back to the lab for adjustments.

Aftercare

Getting dental veneers isn't overly painful and there isn't much of a recovery period. "In the hours following your procedure, your gums might be sore from the area that we administered local anesthesia," says Dr. Rubinov, "but the next day you can expect to love your new smile." If you do experience discomfort afterward, over-the-counter medication can help, he adds.

What Are the Benefits of Dental Veneers?

Veneers have many advantages, experts say, including:

- **They improve the natural appearance of teeth.** Veneers look like “real” teeth, so others aren’t likely to notice you have veneers, says Dr. Rubinov.
- **They are usually well-tolerated.** The procedure isn’t an overly painful one, and recovery typically goes smoothly, notes Dr. Rawdin.
- **Most are stain-resistant.** Porcelain veneers resist stains well and should remain white and bright for their lifetime, notes Dr. Rubinov. However, he reminds that it’s still important to seek regular, routine dental care to keep your teeth and your veneers in top condition.
- **They can fix a variety of dental issues.** “Veneers can be used in cases of trauma resulting in broken teeth, gaps, cracks or when replacing old fillings, but most often can simply be used to enhance a patient’s smile,” Dr. Rawdin says.