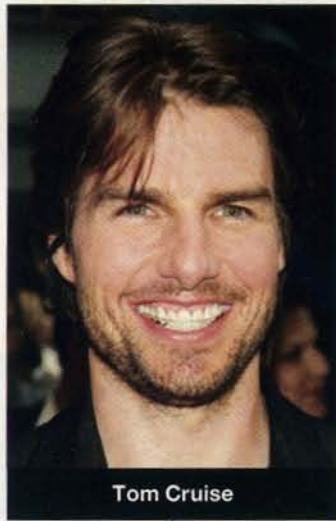


Q&A Clear braces, electric toothbrushes, whitening washes and other mouth matters

Q. My teeth are crooked, but I can't bear the thought of getting metal braces at my age. Do the clear ones work?

Yes. Just ask Tom Cruise, who recently adjusted his smile with porcelain brackets connected by clear wire. "They are more aesthetically pleasing, and they move the teeth just as well," Debra King says. Another eye-



Tom Cruise

pleasing option: Invisalign, a progressive set of retainers that slip right over teeth and are nearly invisible. Every two weeks, as your teeth move into place, you switch to a new retainer. They take about three times longer to correct teeth than metal braces do, "but you can always take the retainer out if you have a hot date," King says. Both transparent braces (\$5,000–\$6,000) and Invisalign (\$3,000–\$5,000) cost significantly more than traditional metal braces (about \$2,500). Also, Invisalign is not recommended for complex orthodontics, such as fixing major bite problems or severely overcrowded teeth.

Q. Will an electric toothbrush clean my teeth better, and make them whiter, than a manual one?

There's no doubt that an electric toothbrush with a built-in timer, such as the new Sonicare Elite 7500 (\$140; available nationwide at dentists' offices and to be sold in stores in May) or the Oral-B 3D Excel Power toothbrush (\$80), would do a more thorough job of cleaning your teeth. The built-in timer

Rembrandt Power Brush whitening gel, \$7; at drugstores. Sonicare Elite 7500 toothbrush, \$140; 888-766-4227.



encourages you to brush for two full minutes, as dentists recommend (most of us brush 30 to 60 seconds with a manual brush). Plus, electric toothbrushes are designed to clean hard-to-reach areas, such as the back of molars. "They get in between the teeth and help to remove plaque. The cleaner your teeth are, the whiter they will stay," King

says. For best results brush twice a day, and try Rembrandt Power Brush whitening gel (\$7), which is formulated for use with an electric brush—it won't foam up in your mouth or clog mechanical gears.

Q. Are whitening mouthwashes, flosses and chewing gums really effective?

If you are flossing regularly and rinsing daily with a mouthwash, that's good. But don't expect to get "wow" whitening results, if any. "I don't believe there is a mouthwash or rinse that you can keep in your mouth long enough to whiten teeth," Goldstein

says. "And floss and gum won't whiten them." However, flossing and rinsing with a mouthwash such as Rembrandt Intense Stain Removal mouthwash (\$6) will help remove plaque—which means that teeth will bleach brighter. "Ideally, you should have your teeth cleaned professionally before you

Rembrandt Intense Stain Removal mouthwash, \$6; drugstores. Orbit whitening gum, \$2; drugstores.



begin any bleaching process, so that your teeth will get whiter," Goldstein adds. As for whitening gums such as Orbit (\$2), let's just say they can't hurt (as long as they're sugarless). Chewing gum helps loosen food particles, which can hinder whitening since they cause plaque. Bottom line: Don't crowd your medicine cabinet. "None of these products will damage your teeth or gums, but if you brush and floss regularly in between bleachings, you don't need 400 other products," says Laurence Rifkin, a dentist in Beverly Hills.

Q. I have large silver fillings in my upper and lower molars. Is there anything I can do about them?

Trade in those silver fillings for tooth-colored composite resin fillings or porcelain inlays. "The composite resin procedure is as simple as having a cavity filled," says King, who estimates the cost at \$150 to \$350 for each resin replacement. Porcelain inlays, which are a bit more complicated require two visits and cost \$750 to \$1,000 each. Expect the inlays to last longer, about 10 to 20 years; the white resin fillings last from five to seven years. Another reason to trade in

your metal: The safety of mercury in amalgam fillings has been called into question by many dentists and public health groups, including the International Academy of Oral Medicine and Toxicology (the American Dental Association and the FDA still claim it's safe). Regardless, you might still want to make the switch. Says King: "If they are old fillings that you had done as a kid, eventually they'll need to be replaced anyway." ■