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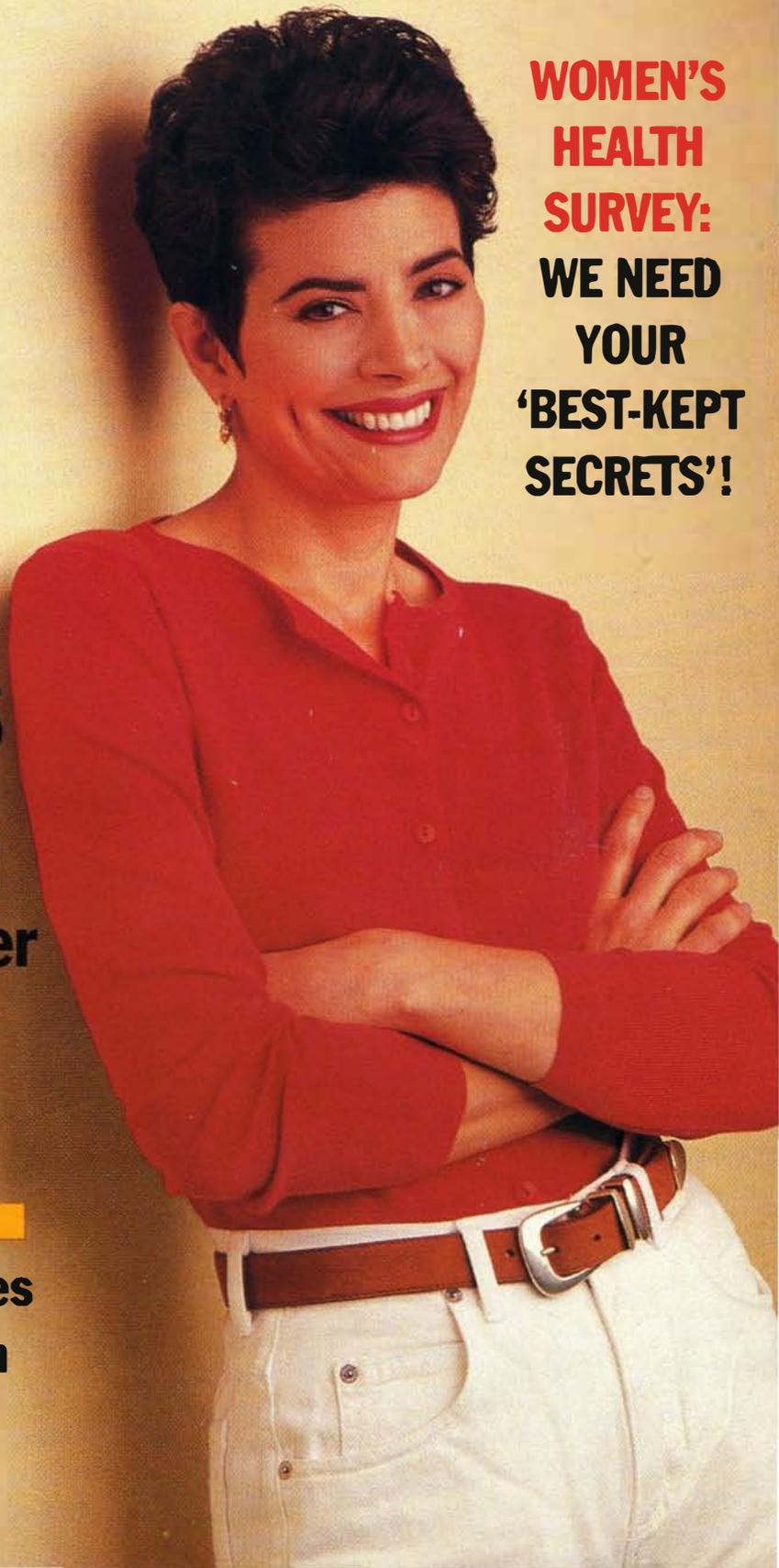
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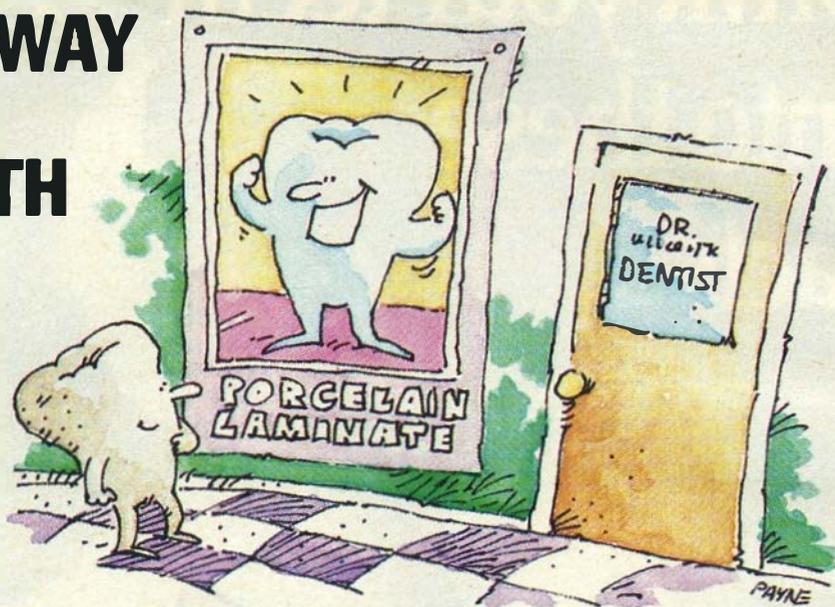
**WOMEN'S
HEALTH
SURVEY:
WE NEED
YOUR
'BEST-KEPT
SECRETS'!**



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A HIGH-TECH WAY TO PICTURE-PERFECT TEETH

Your guide to quick but durable porcelain veneers



AMY'S A BRIGHT, FLEDGLING lawyer, arguing a tough case. When the verdict's announced—her first courtroom victory—her hand flies to her mouth, hiding her smile of triumph. That reflex is her way of covering up a set of grayish teeth, stained from an antibiotic she received during childhood.

Once upon a time, Amy might have had to keep up her hand-to-mouth existence. But now ultrathin porcelain laminate veneers can camouflage healthy yet chipped, poorly spaced or discolored teeth—leaving them relatively intact. In as few as two trips to the dentist, you can boast a new smile, one you can flash whenever you feel like it.

Veneers can have a remarkable effect on people's lives, says Barry G. Dale, D.M.D., a general dentist with special expertise in cosmetic dentistry, and clinical assistant professor at Mount Sinai Medical Center in

New York City. "Sometimes patients are so happy they cry," he says. "There's something releasing about being able to smile rather than feeling they have to stifle it."

Veneers are eggshell-thin pieces of porcelain cemented to teeth, much like false fingernails are applied. The porcelain is remarkably strong despite its thinness. That allows veneers to be used to repair slightly broken or decayed teeth. "They can replace a certain amount of missing tooth structure, but not beyond a certain critical level," says Dr. Dale.

In some cases, veneers can be used to correct teeth that are overlapping or crowded. Protruding areas are contoured with diamond-tipped drills before veneers are attached.

And veneers can be used to close gaps between teeth. "That works best when you have a series of veneers installed, because one or two teeth may look out of proportion to your other

TOM PAYNE

teeth,” says Ronald E. Goldstein, D.D.S., clinical professor of restorative dentistry at the Medical College of Georgia, in Augusta, and author of *Change Your Smile* (Quintessence Publishing Co., 1988).

But veneers are mostly used for cosmetic purposes—especially to cover severely discolored teeth, teeth that have darkened with age or from taking antibiotics like tetracycline during childhood.

“For many people, veneers are a way of dressing for success,” Dr. Dale says. “I had one patient whose mother gave him veneers as a graduation present when he got his M.B.A.”

YOUR OPTIONS

The first step in this process—or in any dental process—is to discuss your options with your dentist. You should also make your expectations clear. Many people have a definite idea how they want their teeth to look, Dr. Goldstein says, but they don’t communicate it.

That can leave both you and your dentist feeling frustrated. Your dentist has many ways to explain the process and expected results. Some dentists even use state-of-the-art computer-imaging equipment to show you what your new, veneer-enhanced smile might look like.

At one time, crowns were the standard remedy for many cosmetic complaints. “But now there’s a viable al-

ternative to using crowns for cosmetic purposes,” Dr. Dale says. Instead, crowns are used most often to correct heavy-duty decay or damage, when there’s little left of the underlying tooth. (For more information, see “The Ins and Outs of Crowns and Bridges,” July 1992.) The drawback to a crown is that a portion of the existing tooth—which may be perfectly healthy, only discolored or misshapen—must be ground away, and a local anesthetic is required.

Veneers, on the other hand, leave most of your original tooth intact, are slightly less expensive and require less anesthetic. And because they’re so thin, the juncture where the veneer hits the gum is more precise. That means there’s less chance of irritation and inflammation.

Veneers can last up to 10 years—or longer—depending on how you take care of them. Make sure you brush and floss daily and have regular teeth cleanings. And try to avoid chomping down on particularly hard foods. “If you chew ice cubes or bite into a bone or seed, you can break a porcelain laminate the same way you could break a tooth or filling,” Dr. Dale says.

You can also protect your veneers from wear by using a plastic mouthpiece at night, when you may be wearing down your teeth without even knowing it. (They’re custom-fitted, upscale versions of a football

player's mouth guard. Your dentist can make one to your specifications.) "If you grind and clench your teeth at night, you're putting tremendous torque on the biting edge of the laminate," says Dr. Goldstein.

For a small chip, bonding—covering the tooth with a plastic material—is also an option. It's less expensive than a veneer and may be done in one visit. But bonding doesn't wear as well as porcelain and tends to stain more. If your teeth are mildly stained, especially if they're stained yellow, you could try bleaching.

FITTING YOUR VENEERS

Once you've settled on porcelain laminate veneers, what's next?

Your tooth is drilled down slightly: 1 millimeter and often less (about $\frac{1}{2}$ of an inch)—so little that you usually don't need a temporary cap. Then your doctor inserts a metal mouth plate filled with a gellike material into your mouth to take an impression of your tooth. That's it for your first visit. He sends the impression to a lab, where a ceramist fashions the veneer—a hollow version of your tooth.

During the next visit after the veneer is fitted, your tooth is coated with a weak acid to help the cement bond. Then your dentist applies a thin coat of cement and slips the veneer over the tooth. This can be slightly tricky because the amount of cement

he uses may affect the final color. The porcelain is so thin that the cement shows through. "The fit of the veneer influences the thickness of the cement," says Dr. Goldstein. "If you press a little bit harder, you may get an entirely different shade, because excess cement may ooze out, leaving a thinner layer." To make sure the veneer matches your other teeth, your dentist may make a trial run using a fake cement paste.

When the veneer is fitted, it's sealed with a high-intensity light beam for about 60 seconds. This causes the light-sensitive cement to set and bond. Now you're ready to go home, your new smile in place.

PRICE TALK

Now to the question that tends to make us cringe: How much do these things cost? Porcelain laminates aren't inexpensive and, in fact, can come close to the price of a crown. Prices for veneers range from \$350 to \$2,500, depending on the area of the country you live in or the difficulty of your dental problem. And, if you don't like your veneers and have them removed and replaced, you may have to pay for that as well.

Most dental plans don't cover the cost of procedures that are purely cosmetic. But dental insurance may cover veneers if they're used to correct a chipped or damaged tooth.

by Sara J. Henry