

AIDS
Special Report

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GIVING TEETH A FACE-LIFT

Early veneers used to crack and peel; now dentists are using long-lasting resins and porcelain laminates that have the look and feel of real tooth enamel.

by Laurie S. Senz

As a teen-ager, Eric Davidson* was proud of his chipped front tooth—the result of an ice-hockey stick grazing his mouth during a high-school game. “I considered it a badge of honor,” he explained. “Besides, my girl friend thought it was cute.”

Ten years later, Eric, a stockbroker, learned that “cute” didn’t cut it in the business world. “I found when I was talking to potential clients, their eyes would keep shifting to my mouth,” he said. “They weren’t seeing me, or my face; they were seeing my chipped tooth! It made me very self-conscious. What was worse, I thought I was stuck with it.”

Eric’s self-diagnosis was wrong. On the recommendation of a friend, he saw Dr. Robert Dolgow, a Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, dentist, who used a simple, one-visit procedure known as composite resin bonding to re-form the missing part of Eric’s left front tooth. Eric was amazed at the result. “It looked like the tooth had never been chipped,” he explained.

Friends, co-workers, and family members immediately noticed a difference in his appearance. “Everyone kept telling me how great I looked,”

*His name was changed, but Eric Davidson’s story is a true one.



Porcelain laminate treatments gave Kathy Payne’s tetracycline-mottled teeth (above) a movie-star sheen.



Eric said. “But they thought I had lost weight or changed my hair style. In fact, no one except my mother guessed that it was my smile that had changed. My own brother even complimented me on my ‘new’ eyeglass frames!”

Bonding is actually a catchall term used to describe the process of attaching tooth-colored, moldable plastic or porcelain laminate veneers to the surface of a tooth. Here’s how it works: The dentist primes the tooth’s surface with a mild acid that creates shallow grooves and fissures. Then he applies a composite resin, molds it into the shape of the tooth, and hardens it with a high-intensity light. The process, developed in the mid-1950s, has revolutionized dentistry.

“Before bonding, patients like Eric, with a healthy tooth that

was broken, chipped, or fractured, had only two choices: file down the tooth in order to cap it with a porcelain crown or live with the disfigurement,” Dr. Dolgow explains. “Bonding literally filled the cosmetic gap in dentistry.”

Bonding is also used to whiten stained or discolored teeth, close gaps or spaces, lengthen short teeth, widen narrow teeth, and sometimes make certain crooked teeth look straight. The procedure is painless, and no anesthesia is needed.

The dentist can apply composite resin directly to the tooth, or he can attach, like a false fingernail, the composite resin or porcelain laminate veneer sculpted by a laboratory. “Direct application requires the dentist to have a fair amount of artistic skill, because the resin must be carved or molded to the shape of the tooth,” explains Dr. Ronald Goldstein, an Atlanta dentist and a clinical professor of restorative dentistry at the Medical College of Georgia’s School of Dentistry. The better the artistic nature of the dentist doing this process, the better the result will be.

A new generation of composite resins allows dentists to mix and layer color tints and “opaquers” in much the same way that highlighters and other facial cosmetics can be blended to achieve various effects. Layering takes extra time, but an artistic dentist can reproduce the translucency of natural teeth.

- Direct bonding is considered a conservative restoration. “Little to no enamel is removed,” Dr. Dolgow explains. “This means the patient still has the option of taking advantage of future technological developments.”

- Indirect bonding using porcelain laminate veneers is more radical, but it is often the bonding of choice when teeth have been badly discolored by such medications as tetracycline, because the layering of color can be more precise.



Dr. Goldstein makes a perfect match using his new color-corrected high-intensity lamp.