

# A brighter smile

**Let's face it** – straight, white teeth can make you look younger and healthier and, according to market research, appear more intelligent, successful and wealthy, while having chipped, dark or crooked teeth can have a negative effect, both on your health and your self-esteem.

But just because you weren't born with a fantastic smile doesn't mean you can't have one. Here in New Zealand, we are fortunate in being able to access world-class cosmetic dentistry without having to travel overseas. A number of the country's top cosmetic dentists have knowledge and skills on par with their colleagues anywhere in the world. Having trained at some of the world's most famous post-graduate teaching institutions they can offer their patients the best-possible results. It has never been easier to improve your smile, whether it's with a small change, like whitening your teeth, or a full smile makeover.

For the best results it is important to consult with a skilled cosmetic dentist before embarking on treatment. By comprehensively analysing your smile, a cosmetic dentist will be able to determine the root cause of the problem and suggest the best options for correcting it. In some cases where the teeth appear dark-coloured, it's not because they are actually dark but because they are angulated wrongly and appear dark. The solution in these cases is to straighten the angulation of the teeth, not whiten the teeth.

Cosmetic dentistry –

## the options

### Porcelain veneers

Porcelain veneers are small, porcelain facings manufactured to fit over the front of the teeth masking out the tooth underneath. When the veneer is made to the desired colour and shape, the tooth appears wonderfully white and perfectly shaped and positioned. Twisted teeth can be transformed to appear straight and completely black teeth appear white again. Often, the teeth are too bulky, so to preserve a natural look size-wise, some drilling of the teeth needs to be done before the veneers are fitted. In conjunction with a skilled ceramic technician, a cosmetic dentist can provide veneers that appear just like real teeth, so that no one is able to tell that you have veneers.

### Bonding

Composite bonding is the use of white filling materials on the front teeth to achieve similar results to porcelain veneers. By artistically layering the filling material on the teeth, the dentist can make them appear straighter, whiter and more ideally shaped. Composite bonding is not as hard and strong as porcelain veneers, but a skilled cosmetic dentist can provide equally beautiful results which, compared to porcelain, are more easily repaired and touched up if required.

### Tooth-coloured fillings

The most popular filling material in the world today has been around for

over 100 years and is still used by most dentists in New Zealand – amalgam. But dental patients have a choice. Composite is a newer polymer material used as an alternative to amalgam with the huge advantage of being tooth-coloured and not metallic silver. Their use is more technique-sensitive than amalgam but if placed correctly will last as well as amalgam and, of course, make your teeth look like they never had a hole in the first place.

### Teeth whitening

There are two general options for professional teeth whitening: 1. Take-home kits and 2. In-office whitening, also known as laser whitening or power whitening. There are many brands and systems available but they all fall into these general categories. Take-home kits usually consist of a "tray" that moulds around your teeth to hold the low-strength whitening gel in place to achieve the whitening effect. You wear the tray for a specified time (ranging from an hour to overnight) for a number of days in a row. Within a week or two the teeth will brighten several shades.

In-office whitening consists of a higher-strength gel (which you can't use at home yourself) painted on the teeth. This is used in conjunction with special barriers placed on the gums and lips to protect them, and often a light designed to speed up the effect of the gel. In a single visit you can achieve the same degree of whitening that would take several days with a home kit.

### Teeth straightening

Recent advances in orthodontics have helped to overcome some of the old worries about having your teeth straightened, with the process faster and less visible than ever before. Ceramic braces instead of metal ones can make the whole operation much more discreet, while Invisalign, a completely different technology, utilises clear, removable aligners instead of braces to push the teeth into position.

### Combination treatments

For many people, having one type of treatment is not going to yield the

best results. For instance, there is only a limited amount you can do by straightening the teeth when they are also chipped or worn down. Your cosmetic dental expert will consider combining treatments to give you the best and most conservative treatment options and discuss the pros and cons of different approaches.

### At-home solutions

Of course you can't really straighten your teeth or fix that chip at home, so DIY cosmetic dentistry is limited to tooth whitening. However, there are a lot of inexpensive teeth-whitening products available from pharmacies and supermarkets. Generally, the active whitening ingredient is of a lower concentration than anything used by dental professionals so results are likely to be slower and less noticeable. But, with the cost of products such as whitening toothpastes, paint-on gels and whitening mouthwashes being far less than professional systems, it's worth a try.

### Taking care of your smile

The most important aspect of cosmetic dentistry is actually regular dentistry – preventing damage to your teeth and gums and maintaining their health. Regular visits to your dentist and dental hygienist are crucial for maintaining the health of your teeth and any cosmetic work you have had done. If the gum tissue is kept healthy with regular gum disease screenings and cleanings, the life of your teeth and dental work will increase and the beauty will be maintained. If any problems occur, they will usually be very small if found early. Brushing two or three times daily and flossing every day will massage the gums and remove any food, plaque and staining on and between the teeth. This is a crucial part of ensuring a lifelong, beautiful smile. **wi**

– By Dr Roger Tiang

Dr Roger Tiang practises cosmetic dentistry and non-specialist orthodontics at Downtown Dental Auckland.



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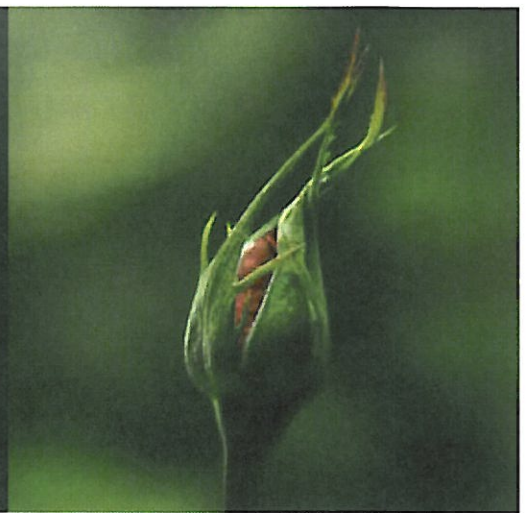
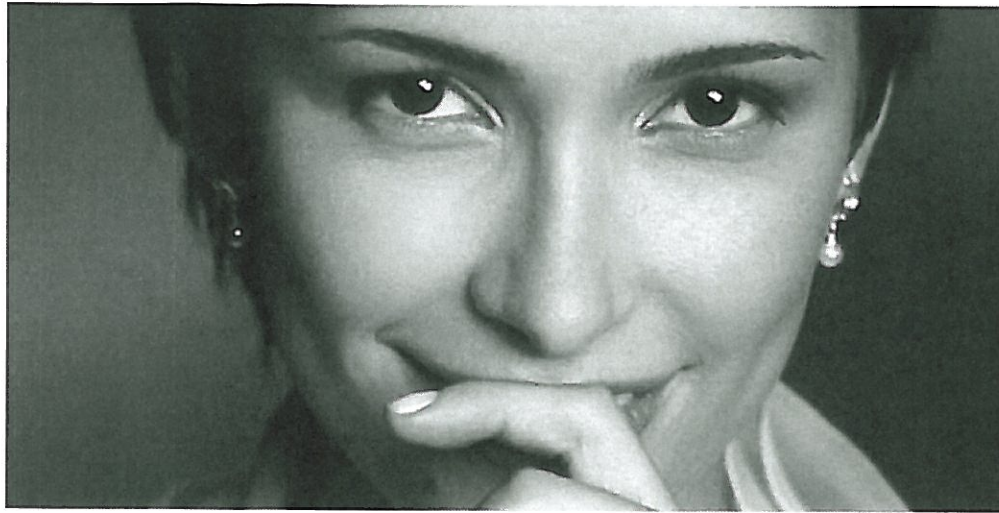
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Lvl6, 152 Quay St, CBD

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[info@straightteeth.co.nz](mailto:info@straightteeth.co.nz)

[www.straightteeth.co.nz](http://www.straightteeth.co.nz)

**DR. BOB YANG**

**North Shore**

**The Dental Centre Browns Bay**

81 Clyde Rd, Browns Bay

Telephone (09) 479 7710

[info@bbdc.co.nz](mailto:info@bbdc.co.nz)

[www.bbdc.co.nz](http://www.bbdc.co.nz)

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