

# Perfect smiles

If your natural smile isn't everything you want it to be then now is the time to do something about it, say Australia's top cosmetic dentists. By Kelly Baker.

They say the eyes are the windows to the soul, but if there's a feature that reveals almost as much, then it has to be the smile. Sexy, sweet or even a little dangerous, a smile can project warmth, openness, mystery or humour. It can bring hope, turn strangers into friends, and possibly even swing you a discount at the local fruit and vegetable store.

Yes, it involves little more than a curve of the lips, but research has shown your smile can make or break you, particularly as far as first impressions go.

In fact, a 2007 study carried out by Stollznow Research for GSK Consumer Healthcare which involved 1,000 Australians, found that more than half of those surveyed agreed an appealing smile was either important or very important in terms of first impressions. Other studies have shown if your pearly whites are in great shape you're more likely to be perceived as successful, to land the job of your dreams or even the love of your life.

So, what if your smile is projecting the wrong image or simply isn't doing your gorgeous personality justice? Well that's no problem, says Sydney-based cosmetic dentist Dr Jeffrey Albert. "No matter what the trouble is, we can fix it," he says. "There are always a number of options. These days nobody has to live with a smile that isn't everything they want it to be."

That said, some cosmetic dentistry procedures don't come cheap. So before you commit yourself to any major work, talk to your dentist about exactly how much it's going to cost and how long they expect the work to last. You may also like to ask them whether you can set up a pay-as-you-go financial arrangement or whether they offer any sort of package deals. Many dentists offer both of these payment options. Also, ask if there are more affordable options available that might be suitable both for your teeth and your bank balance. It's highly possible you'll find a happy middle ground, says Dr Albert.

## A brave new world

The world of dentistry has come a long way during recent years, meaning that today a knockout smile is within everybody's reach. Here, we look at some of the most cutting-edge treatments available, from dental implants to the latest in at-home bleaching techniques, and whether they might work for you.

## Change your smile, change your life

It may sound a little far-fetched, but a dazzling smile has the capacity to completely transform you, says cosmetic dentist Dr Jeffrey Albert. "Changing your teeth can change your psyche," he says. "I have clients who are completely inhibited when they arrive. But after they've had their teeth worked on, they are brimming with self-confidence. The way they carry themselves and even their personalities seem to change. Suddenly they become who they were meant to be. As a dentist, it is the most rewarding thing to see."

## Did you know?

According to a clinical trial reported in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, treating periodontitis (gum disease) may help to prevent heart disease and stroke. The theory is that when you reduce inflammation in the gums, it may also reduce inflammation throughout the body. That in turn could reduce inflammation within the arteries and therefore decrease your chances of heart attack and stroke. To help prevent gum disease in the first place, brushing and flossing twice a day is vital.

Brushing and flossing twice daily is the first step to dental health.

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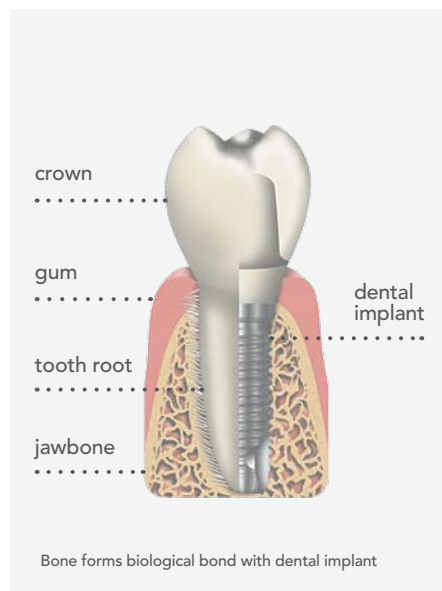
“Wearing the cheek retractors was a little weird; I felt as if I’d swallowed a snorkel, and looked like Hannibal Lector in a restraint mask! But it was worth it. My teeth are noticeably whiter.”

### Dental implants

Once upon a time, a missing tooth was something you just had to accept, but thankfully those days are well and truly behind us. Now, if you’re unlucky enough to lose a tooth whether it’s due to trauma, such as a car accident or a sporting injury, or simply severe decay or gum disease, you have the option of replacing it with what’s known as a dental implant.

Admittedly, dental implants take some work, but they look just like the real thing and they’re built to last. Plus, they’re permanently fixed, so unlike false teeth, you can eat what you like. How do they work? Firstly, your dentist will drill a hole in the jaw bone. He or she will then insert a metal bolt. Once the area has healed, an artificial tooth (generally made from porcelain-fused alloy) is attached to the bolt and hey presto, problem solved. The good news is this procedure is nowhere near as frightening as it sounds. “It sounds rather grim, but it’s actually quite straightforward,” says dentist, Dr Craig Erskine-Smith.

**Cost:** Implants might be effective, but they’re not exactly cheap, with a single tooth costing anything from \$2,500 to \$5,000 and upwards.



### Invisible braces

Gorgeous, straight teeth have long been within reach, but getting them usually required metal braces. While metal braces are extremely effective, they can be uncomfortable, not to mention embarrassing if you’re no longer in high school. The great news is, if you have crooked teeth, you now have another option – a virtually invisible teeth-straightening technique called Invisalign. This method involves a set of clear, plastic moulds custom-made for your teeth. Known as aligners, these moulds are worn around-the-clock, although you can pop them out if you really want to. Every two weeks the aligners are updated so your teeth gradually shift into the perfect smile you desire.

“Braces are great for teens, but if you’re an adult who’s simply after good-looking front teeth then Invisalign is perfect,” says Dr Erskine-Smith. Of course, to achieve optimal results you will need to wear the aligners for about 12 months or more, depending on the condition of your teeth and the severity of your problem.

**Cost:** It depends on how complex your problem is, but anywhere from \$4,000 to \$8,000 or more.



### Crowns and veneers

Crowns, also known as caps, are single covers that can be attached to teeth that are broken, heavily filled or in a generally bad state. They wrap around the tooth (which is first filed into shape), and leave it looking gorgeous, but perhaps more importantly, add strength to the underlying tooth structure so they reduce the risk of cracks or other types of structural damage. Crowns have been around for many years, but until recently they had a substructure made of metal, which meant they often appeared strangely dull and lifeless. Worse, as they aged they had a tendency to develop purplish or metallic discolouration near the gum line. Today, however, full-porcelain crowns are available, meaning they look completely natural and, better still, they stay that way.

If you have only minor imperfections, you could perhaps opt for veneers. Veneers, which are generally made of porcelain, are custom-designed shells that are bonded directly onto the teeth, kind of like false nails. They’re great for people with gaps, stains, chips or over-crowding issues.

**Cost:** Porcelain crowns and veneers cost approximately \$1,400 per tooth.



### Teeth whitening

If your pearly whites are a little closer to cream... or even coffee colour, then you might want to consider having them lightened. Today, you can have your teeth whitened by up to 10 shades in as little as 45 minutes. To do this, your dentist will buff your teeth and apply a whitening gel, which is then activated using a laser, such as in the Smartbleach system, or ultraviolet light, as in the Zoom system.

Alternatively, you can whiten your teeth at home. One of the most effective ways to do this is to have your dentist provide you with properly fitted orthodontic trays that can be filled with whitening gel. This is a slower process than in-chair bleaching, but it’s equally, if not more, effective, says Dr Erskine-Smith. “Take-home bleaching enables the patient to put the bleach on for much longer and to keep using it until it has worked,” he explains.

If you’ve already tried at-home bleaching but didn’t achieve the results you were after, it’s worth having another go. “There has been a new development so the trays hold the bleach better,” says Dr Erskine-Smith.

**Cost:** In-chair tooth whitening costs about \$1,000. Home bleaching kits cost approximately \$300 to \$600 or more.

**Note:** When it comes to whitening, less is more. Glaringly bright teeth appear unnatural, so talk to your dentist about which shade is appropriate for your complexion and also ask to see pictures of the shade they suggest.



### I tried this...

I visited Dr Mark Dennes at his Sydney practice for a Smartbleach laser whitening treatment. This system is so precise it can treat a single tooth. It works on the toughest stains, and doesn’t require any follow-up home bleaching. The process took about an hour and involved only a few pangs of tooth sensitivity. Wearing the cheek retractors was a little weird; I felt as if I’d swallowed a snorkel, and looked like Hannibal Lector in a restraint mask! But it was worth it. My teeth, which were at the darker end of the spectrum, are noticeably whiter, and I’m smiling wider and more often. *Kieren Charteris*



### Pain-free procedures

Having someone poke around in your mouth while quite possibly causing you pain is nobody’s idea of a good time, but today there are plenty of ways to make your procedure easier to bear. The first and most important step is to find a dentist you feel comfortable with. “There are some scary dentists out there,” says Dr Erskine-Smith. “But these days, most people have bright, comfortable, modern, happy-looking treatment facilities.”

Many surgeries also offer mod cons such as TVs fixed to the ceiling or MP3 players pre-programmed with relaxing tunes. Most carry nitrous oxide gas to ease your fears and provide some pain relief. Alternatively, you can opt for oral sedation – a tablet that’s similar to Valium. If that’s not enough, however, you can always head to a dentist who offers ‘twilight’ sedation. This style of sedation means you remain conscious during the procedure, but you won’t remember a thing. It does require an anaesthetist, however, so it won’t come cheap.

**Cost:** A warm, welcoming atmosphere costs nothing. Nitrous oxide will cost about \$50 per appointment. Intravenous sedation prices vary, so speak with your dentist first. ■

Left (from top): The Smartbleach system uses a handheld laser pen; Zoom employs an ultraviolet lamp; Nitewhite bleaching gel works with moulded trays.

### Finding a great dentist

The simplest way to find a terrific dentist is to ask friends, family and co-workers for recommendations and test them out for yourself, advises Dr Albert. The number one thing to look out for, he adds, is thoroughness, meaning that they will check and measure every tooth. They should also be able to provide evidence of ongoing education in the field of dentistry, says Dr Erskine-Smith. “People who do lots of courses are aware of all the latest developments,” he says. “But don’t just judge them by how gentle they are; sometimes it’s necessary for a dentist to be firm to get the job done,” he says.

### Useful contacts

Dr Jeffrey Albert: (02) 9233 2577.

Australian Dental Association: [www.ada.org.au](http://www.ada.org.au).

Nobel Biocare veneers, crowns and implants: [www.nobelismile.com.au](http://www.nobelismile.com.au).

Invisalign invisible braces: 1800 468 472; [www.invisalign.com.au](http://www.invisalign.com.au).

Smartbleach laser teeth whitening: 1800 253 224; [www.smartbleach.com.au](http://www.smartbleach.com.au).

Zoom ultraviolet teeth whitening: [www.discusdental.com/international/au](http://www.discusdental.com/international/au).

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