

Too Old For Cosmetic Dentistry? Think Again

Flossmoor's Charles Greenebaum explains how cosmetic dentistry improves smiles.

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Dr. Charles Greenebaum.
Photo courtesy of Lori Tozer

Recently, Mrs. Jones (not her real name) came into my office. She is 85 years old and just got remarried. She didn't like the way one of her teeth looked and wanted to know if I could fix it. I told her I could. A half hour later she was thrilled with her "new tooth" and gave me a big hug. I had just performed cosmetic dentistry on an 85-year-old woman.

Does that surprise you?
Well, I also saw Mrs. Smith

(also not her real name) recently. She is 83 years old and has been a patient of mine for about 15 years. Mrs. Smith did not like the way her teeth looked either. In fact, she had first told me that about 10 years ago. When I explained back then how I could help her she declined saying she was just too old to consider making her teeth look nicer. Mrs. Smith has decided she now wants to do something. Why? Her great granddaughter recently asked if her teeth were always so ugly. It's funny how kids have a knack for telling the truth.

"I'm 75 years old. That's too old to change the looks of my teeth." This is a common response when I tell people the options they have that would improve the appearance of their teeth. The same people continue to color their hair, get new glasses, use the latest cosmetics, wear nice clothes; all with the same nasty looking teeth. They aren't too old. People always want to look good, whether they are in high school or in a retirement home. Mrs. Smith allowed 10 years to go by before she saw how important nice looking teeth were to her.

I guess when most people hear the words "cosmetic dentistry" they think of very white straight teeth. In reality it is anything that improves one's smile. It can involve something very minor such as rounding out a tooth or something major like rehabbing the entire mouth. Some people may want white, straight teeth. Others may just want a chipped tooth fixed. It's up to the individual and what is motivating him or her. It could be a family reunion or wedding; perhaps a new companion. Or maybe it's just plain old pride. So what are some specific concerns that can be addressed with cosmetic dentistry?

Yellow or stained teeth

Almost everyone wants whiter teeth. This can in most cases be easily accomplished by using a whitening gel. In some cases the teeth are made whiter by covering them with bonding material, porcelain veneers or even crowns.

Missing teeth

It is obvious that if someone has a missing front tooth, replacing it will improve their smile. What people may not be aware of is that replacing back teeth can also improve or prevent a collapsed face.

Chipped or worn teeth

Smoothing out small chips can make a huge difference. When large pieces of tooth have fractured or worn off, then bonding, veneers or caps may be needed.

Old dentures

Over time, dentures just wear out. The teeth become stained and lose their original shape. When people have worn out dentures, they don't only have a compromised smile but their entire face collapses. A new set of dentures not only dramatically improves the smile but also gives support back to the face.

Crooked teeth

Whether your teeth were always crooked or shifted over the years, they can be straightened with Invisalign. Clear aligners are worn which move the teeth over time. Dentists can also make the teeth look straighter by veneering or capping teeth.

Old crowns and fillings

Old silver fillings stain and darken teeth. You may not be aware of it until you see a photograph of yourself and notice the gray teeth in your smile. The silver in most cases can be easily replaced by a tooth colored filling which is almost invisible. The materials which crowns are made of have also improved dramatically, allowing us to make crowns that look natural.

Removable dentures

Generally, removable partial dentures are held in with metal wires called clasps. When visible, the clasps can be unsightly. Today there are several alternatives which allow for the clasps to be eliminated.

So if you think you are too old for cosmetic dentistry, think again. Look in the mirror. Is there anything you don't like about your smile? Tell your dentist and see what options are available. You will be glad you did.