

PORCELAIN VENEERS

Porcelain veneers are thin tooth-coloured porcelain (ceramic) shells carefully crafted and bonded to the front of unsightly teeth. They cover the front surface of teeth and allow changes to a more pleasing shape and colour. They are a more conservative treatment than a crown and can often be used as an alternative if the underlying tooth is strong and healthy. They are usually placed on front teeth.

Veneers can be excellent for treating chipped, discoloured, slightly misaligned or misshapen teeth, or gaps between the teeth. A tooth that is too small or has irregularities can be successfully treated with a veneer.

Three visits to your dentist will usually be required to prepare the teeth and fit the veneers. Your dentist will discuss your needs with you and plan the treatment that suits you best.

The first appointment typically takes from one to three hours, depending on the number of teeth to be treated. To prepare each tooth, your dentist will remove a thin layer, about the thickness of a fingernail, from the surface of the tooth. This allows room for the veneer to be glued into place later. A local anaesthetic may be required during this step. An impression is taken of your teeth and sent to a dental ceramist, who creates and manufactures the veneers to fit your teeth.

Cementing of the new veneers occurs at the next appointment and will take a few hours. Your dentist will check on the colour and fit before finally bonding them into place. The teeth are cleaned with a chemical that helps bond the veneer to the tooth. After cement is placed between the veneer and your tooth, a light beam activates the cement to bond the veneer firmly.

Colour can be altered by using varying shades of cement, so it is important that you discuss any changes you require before the final cementing is done. Once the veneer is bonded to the teeth the colour cannot be changed. After the veneer has been bonded, it is trimmed and polished.

The care of veneers

Caring for your veneers will ensure that they last longer. Regular checks with the dentist who fitted them, or one who is experienced in the care of veneers, is recommended. During your visit, the veneers will be polished, and any irregularities will be trimmed. Mention to your dentist if you have noticed any problems during brushing or flossing.

Excessive chewing or biting, especially on foods like hard lollies, ice or bones may break the porcelain. Holding other

hard objects in your teeth such as nails, pens or bottle tops may damage the veneers.

If they are struck by sharp objects, porcelain veneers can fracture, just like normal teeth. Wearing a mouthguard during sport is strongly recommended.

Good dental hygiene is important to extend the life of the veneers. Regular brushing with fluoride toothpaste and flossing after meals will help to prevent decay.

Advantages of veneers

- Application is relatively painless.
- If the tooth underneath is strong enough, veneers can be a simpler and cheaper alternative to crowns.
- Veneers are resistant to staining due to age, tea, coffee or smoking.
- The porcelain and the cement used in the cementing process are strong, making veneers comparable in strength to normal teeth.
- When applied professionally and cared for regularly, veneers can last for many years.
- Porcelain will not decay.

Disadvantages of veneers

- A veneer cannot be repaired if it is damaged or if the gum shrinks away from the top edge.
- Veneers tend to be relatively expensive.
- A small amount of tooth must be removed during preparation.

Other considerations with veneers

After your dentist prepares your teeth and you are waiting for the fitting of the veneers, the teeth will feel rough and strange due to their exposed, buffed surfaces. At this time, teeth may be more sensitive to air or touch and to hot or cold foods. They are also more likely to stain. Attention to hygiene is important during this time. The exposed teeth can be covered with a temporary veneer if you wish, although this is not usually necessary and will increase the cost of the procedure.

Veneers are not a replacement for corrective dental procedures in people with overcrowded or badly misaligned teeth, or upper and lower teeth that do not meet evenly. As healthy gums are essential to the success of veneers, daily attention to oral hygiene is important.

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