

MAKE-OVER MAGIC

Dear Dr. McCrummen, Please write about the dental make-over possibilities. I have always wanted a nicer smile but I am on a budget. What kind of options do I have for red, bleeding gums and crooked, dark teeth? Sounds bad, I know. I smoke, drink coffee, and am not good at flossing or seeing the dentist very often either. Do I need to see a specialist or can my dentist do this? How long will it take and where do I begin? T.H.

A "Make-over" involves new technological ways to make positive changes in our appearance. To some this provides hope for more confidence, a better self-image, opportunities for a new occupation, or a new relationship.

The smile has a major impact on the facial appearance and can be changed fairly quickly. The budget route usually has its limitations and people are often not happy with the results. The quality route will usually be longer lasting and more gratifying. "You get what you pay for", as most of us experience, but you will get more for your money if you can change your lifestyle and be motivated to maintain what you invest in. It takes a team effort to make dental changes and you are the most important member of the team.

The first thing to do is change the bad habits you mentioned above that will damage your smile and health. The next step is to see your dentist for a comprehensive evaluation including x-rays. You will likely need a thorough cleaning or other treatment to allow your gums to heal. This helps provide a firm foundation for your cosmetic treatment and allow for a better esthetic result. A consultation with the dentist will be an important time to find out what options you have, based on what you need, what you desire, and the realistic possibilities considering the condition of your teeth. Treatment may take time and patience for the best result.

Cosmetic dentistry is not a "specialty" recognized by the American Dental Association. Most *General or Family Dentists* receive training, take special continuing education courses, and provide a variety of cosmetic dental treatment. However, your dentist may refer you to a specialist for certain aspects of treatment for your gums (periodontist), removal of teeth or to place implants (oral surgeon/exodontist), or for root canal therapy (endodontist). If your dentist does not choose to do cosmetic treatment, or does not feel comfortable with the treatment you desire, it may be recommended that you see a dentist that does.

Without knowing the condition of your teeth and gums it is impossible to guess what you may need to meet your desires. The options may include doing nothing, involve bleaching alone, changing the shape of your teeth, orthodontics, cosmetic bonding, placing veneers, crowns, bridges, implants, or dentures. Your expectations must be made very clear for your dentist to know if they can be met, and to give you a close estimate of costs. Dental insurance will usually not cover cosmetic dentistry.

Regarding costs, there are things that can be done even on a small budget but they may not provide the long lasting results of a quality make-over. Earl Sheib used to advertise that he would "paint any car, any color, for \$29.95". It did not compare with quality of a \$2,000 professional job, did not last very long, and it often peeled off when it was washed. If you desire quality dental care and it is beyond your means banks can provide health care loans. Better yet, you could use a credit card with airline mileage benefits and treat your new smile to a free flight to someplace fun.