



# 10 Things You Should Know Before Choosing a Cosmetic Dentist

A fabulous, stop-'em-in-their-tracks smile—you've wanted it, seemingly forever. You've put it off for too long, perhaps taking care of others first, or unsure of where to start. Now, you're ready to make the change, to give yourself the gift that will change your outlook on life, and the way people perceive you. **Think of it as an investment in yourself**, one that will return its value to you for years, knowing that every time you smile or laugh, you can do so with carefree self-confidence.

Where do you start? Well, the old adage for real estate—location, location, location—simply doesn't apply when it comes to aesthetic (also called cosmetic) and restorative dentistry. The majority of dental procedures are not reversible, so before you let your fingers do the walking through the yellow pages to find whoever happens to be close by, devote a bit of energy to finding an expert, talented dental professional to make your smile into what you've dreamed it could be. You'll be glad you did.

Contact your state dental association, ask your dentist, or ask a specialist like an orthodontist or oral surgeon to recommend a cosmetic dentist. You can also contact professionals in related industries, such as plastic surgeons or modeling agencies. If you know someone who's sporting a stellar smile, ask for her dentist's phone number. Use the guidelines below to make your decision, and get more than one opinion if it makes you comfortable.

First, some layman's terminology. The most frequent procedures requested in cosmetic dentistry are whitening and veneers.

Tooth whitening is the highest requested and most-often performed procedure. There are several over-the-counter products available today for teeth whitening, but treatments from your dentists are the safest, fastest, and most effective way to brighten your smile. Veneers are thin, custom-made porcelain or direct composite moldings that cover the fronts of problem teeth. They can cover unsightly gaps, stained, misshapen, damaged, or crooked teeth. You'd be amazed at what veneers can do to totally transform your smile, and even the look of your whole face.

Not all dentists are created equal, and exceptional skill level and experience make a dramatic difference. Here are the top 10 things to look for when you're selecting a cosmetic dentist.

## One | Accreditation

*Ask for aesthetic credentials.*

Your dentist should be accredited by a major cosmetic dental association such as the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry (AACD). Keep in mind that there's a big difference between being a member of the organization, and being accredited by them. Accreditation requires written and oral exams, submission of clinical case studies, and a dedication to continuing education and protocols.<sup>1</sup> It is a much higher standard. For example, there are approximately 5,000 members in the AACD, but only about 250 of them are fully accredited.

The three major cosmetic dental associations are:

- > The American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry, [www.aacd.com](http://www.aacd.com)
- > The American Academy of Esthetic Dentistry, [www.estheticacademy.org](http://www.estheticacademy.org)
- > The American Society of Dental Aesthetics, [www.asdatoday.com](http://www.asdatoday.com)

## Two | Artistic Excellence

*Look for an artisan.*

Pour through photo portfolios of patients or online Smile Galleries to select an artist who appreciates the nuances that make each smile unique, who has the exceptional skills to custom tailor your look. Smile Design is the name for the unique art of transforming problem teeth into a flawless smile. An inspired cosmetic dentist looks at each smile as a potential work of art, with unique challenges and distinctive characteristics.

Your dentist should consider factors such as mouth shape, bite shape, size and health of teeth and gum line, color of teeth, your face's shape and skin tone, and much more. But when you're looking at before and after pictures of Smile Design clients, you



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don't have to worry about all the technicalities. Simply look for smiles that look natural, like they were always meant to be. See how the new smile transforms a person's face. You'll find yourself automatically drawn to the smiles that appeal most to you.

It's a good sign if your dentist has professional photography of his or her own patients. Images in portfolios and web galleries should highlight actual cases they have completed.

P.S. There should be more photos in a dentist's portfolio than his or her spouse and office staff!

### Three | Training

*Inquire about expertise.*

Make sure your practitioner has advanced, postgraduate training with live patients, specifically in the procedures that interest you. He or she should also attend 25 to 35 hours per year of continuing education in cosmetic dentistry.

The American Dental Association states that dentists in Washington are required to take a minimum of 21 hours of continuing education credits each year to maintain their license to practice dentistry.<sup>2</sup> It's a safe bet that you want to find someone who does more than squeak by on their credentials.

Dentists who take pride in staying on top of their game aren't shy about telling you where they've trained. Take a quick look online for their training credentials. Often, the best dentists are not only regularly attending classes, forums, and lectures, they are also the people sought out to instruct other dentists. Take it a step further, and find a dentist who is in high demand to train his or her peers.

### Four | Technology

*Find a progressive practice.*

Dentists using the latest high-tech equipment and materials are also more likely to be up to date on the most recent treatments. Safety is a given—ask for a quick tour of the office. Notice if the staff are wearing gloves and masks. Get a feel for the cleanliness and organization of the clinical areas. Don't be timid about asking to see sterilization equipment or sanitized and sealed tools and materials.

Beyond that, diagnostic computers, intra-oral cameras, and smile imaging, for example, are indicators of a leading-edge practice.

### Five | Consultation

*Demand quality face time.*

You have a right to a thorough consultation, directly with the dentist who will be doing your work. If the procedures involve veneers or smile makeovers, you should have an opportunity to spend up to an hour, without charge, to sit down and describe what you want, ask questions, and go over the procedures, costs, and expectations.

An honorable clinician will be up front with you about everything. Find someone who will listen to your hopes and desires, truly listen. If the person across the desk from you is more interested in sharing his or her latest golf scores, walk away and take your business elsewhere. There are well-trained, excellent cosmetic dentists all over the country, and you deserve someone who will give you personalized care and customized treatment.

Once you've decided on the procedure, your dentist should make sure a complete general exam is done, or has been done fairly recently, to isolate and treat any underlying basics, such as cavities or periodontal (gum) cleaning. If you already have a "regular" dentist, you should allow your cosmetic specialist access to your recent x-rays and exam results.

### Six | Laboratory

*Examine the dentist's lab.*

Put the associated lab and materials under a microscope. An expert dentist will be excited about the materials they are using, and happy to tell you the name of the lab that produces them. This is really about the materials that are going to be used to create a more natural-looking, long-lasting smile. If you're looking at teeth whitening, look at the websites for the product your dentist recommends—BriteSmile and Zoom are two of the most well-respected and widely-used brands. For veneers, there are several different brands, made from various materials, that vary in realism, strength, stain resistance, and longevity.

### Seven | Time

*Kick back for a few hours.*

Think of it as a couple of trips to the day spa—with results that will continue to earn you compliments long after the glow from a salt scrub body polish has worn off. There are some variations, but after the initial hour of consultation, most procedures require a few more visits, of 2 or more hours, 2-3 weeks apart.



The first visit is for all the prep procedures, and you'll be fitted for temporary veneers. Then the dentist goes to work with the lab to create the permanent, custom veneers. At your second visit, your new veneers will be cemented into place.

You shouldn't need any downtime for recovery, and you can usually return to your regular routine immediately. You might want to mention to your practitioner if you're going to be playing professional hockey anytime soon, or doing any kick boxing—bite guards are typically not included.

### **Eight | Cost**

*Don't skimp on your smile.*

Cosmetic dentistry isn't just for celebrities and supermodels anymore. It is surprisingly accessible. Financing plans are available and some cosmetic dental options are covered by insurance, so check with your dental and medical insurance providers.

Don't automatically go for the lowest bidder. Low-bidders aren't doing you any favors, they're cutting corners on the quality of materials, or worse, on things that can affect your safety and outcomes. If someone is offering to do something at far below industry averages, be suspicious...very suspicious.

### **Nine | Form & Function**

*Think beyond beauty.*

Of course, your looking for someone who appreciates the color, luminosity, and shape of a natural-looking smile. But, the perfect smile is a marriage of beauty with durability and functionality. Get honest answers from your dentists regarding how treatment will affect your bite, your gums, and the general action of your teeth. Ask how long your ceramics should last, what you should do to maintain them, and what you should avoid doing (like biting the price tags off of that new designer dress, admit it, you've done it!).

You want to feel comfortable enough to form a long-term relationship with your new dentist. Should anything go wrong—

cracking, chipping, or color changes—you'll be confident that you'll get fast repairs and ongoing service. You want to form a bond, pardon the pun, with your smile makeover artist.

### **Ten | Comfort**

*Expect to be pampered.*

Go with your gut feelings on this one. It's the little things that can really matter in life. Decide what's most important to you, be it validated parking, a soothing atmosphere, a friendly staff, or tea and water service with lemon in the lobby. There's every reason to find an office that caters to your needs, even spoils you.

You can expect to be given the star treatment, and treated with care and discretion. For example, dentists must have your express permission before they use photos of you in their portfolios or post them online. It's up to you. There's even a new trend in the industry: dental spas. But that's a completely separate report.

Finally, we hope you've enjoyed this informative piece, and feel prepared to take that first step towards a beautiful new smile. You're ready to make the change, to give yourself the gift that will impact your outlook on life, and the way people perceive you. Call the office of Dr. Rhys Spoor today to schedule your complimentary smile design consultation, 206.682.8200.

*This report is being provided to you courtesy of Rhys Spoor, DDS, an internationally-acclaimed cosmetic and restorative dentist with a practice in Seattle, Washington. Dr. Spoor is one of a handful of dentists in the region accredited by the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry. Since 1987, Dr. Spoor has taught advanced clinical programs to practicing dentists worldwide, and he continues to be sought out as a lecturer for his artistic abilities, creativity, and technical expertise.*

Sources:

1 [www.aacd.com/credentialing/resources/faq.aspx](http://www.aacd.com/credentialing/resources/faq.aspx)

2 [www.ada.org/proffprac/licensure/continuing.ed.pdf](http://www.ada.org/proffprac/licensure/continuing.ed.pdf)



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