



a *Smile*
is Always in Style

HOW TO LOOK GREAT
AND FEEL AMAZING

HUGH FLAX DDS, AAACD, MICOI

PRAISE FOR DR. HUGH FLAX

I had always been reluctant to smile because of the space between my two front teeth. One picture taken at my youngest son's wedding showed my teeth and I realized just how bad they looked. My oldest son commented that I would "be so pretty" if I had the space between my teeth closed, and suggested I consult with a cosmetic dentist. I took his suggestion and scheduled a consultation with [Dr. Flax].

My first visit with [Dr. Flax] revealed that I was actually missing a tooth on both sides of [my] front teeth. In addition, there was excess tissue between these teeth, which was connected to my upper gum. While I have always had regular dental care, I had never been told this before. It was then that I decided to begin the process of correction. Now, I enjoy smiling because of my beautiful teeth.

Thanks to [Dr. Flax] and [his] wonderful staff. The care, concern, and love I received on each visit were special. In return, I want [Dr. Flax] to know how appreciative I am. I have a new "dental family," and I love each of you.

—**Hazel M. Roberts**
patient

A wonderful read! Hugh is someone who understands real people, smiles, and ethics. This book is a fitting addition to his outstanding contribution to global dentistry.

—**Tif Querishi, BDS**
*clinical director, IAS Academy
editorial board, Dental Update
former president, BACD*

The Moses of Dentistry, Dr. Hugh Flax! More than ten years ago, Dr. Flax changed my life.

I came to him seeking a new smile look. I wanted to eliminate a big front gap, an overbite, uneven teeth on the bottom and the top, and the dingy color. Dr. Flax met with me and showed me a picture of the expected outcome. He answered all of my questions and we agreed on the plan. Several months later, following Invisalign and impressions, Dr. Flax put the four temporary veneers on and I was so impressed! Dr. Flax gave me his cell phone number to call if I had any problems. I left the office feeling that a true miracle had been performed. My next step was to return in a week or two to get my permanent smile. I was truly a happy camper!

Several days later, on a Sunday afternoon, I broke one of the temporary veneers. I was dining with several friends when it happened. I shouted, "Oh my God, I just broke my tooth." I then said, "Let me call my dentist." One of my friends bet me \$50 that my dentist would not answer the telephone on a Sunday. I took the bet! I called Dr. Flax, and he answered on the second ring and told me to meet him at the office. I got my \$50 and left to meet Dr. Flax at his office. Dr. Flax fixed my temporary veneer at no charge. I later shared with him the story about the bet, and we laughed together! I returned later to Dr. Flax's office to receive my permanent smile. He did an awesome job! That's when I deemed him to be the "Moses of Dentistry!"

Everywhere I go, people talk about my beautiful smile. A day never passes without me receiving commendations on my majestic smile! Now, fast forward to March 9, 2019. I have a bad fall that resulted in several bruises and two broken teeth. I immediately sent Dr. Flax an instant message and a picture of my face. Dr. Flax responded within five minutes. Once again, Dr. flax was there for me. When

my mother saw my temporary veneers, she said, "Yes, he really is the Moses of Dentistry!" I am wearing my temporary veneers and will return soon to get my new permanent smile once again. Dr. Flax is the greatest! He gives me his very best every time!

Thanks, Dr. Flax, you will always be my MOSES OF DENTISTRY!

—Dr. Frances E. Davis

*chief human resources officer, Gwinnett County Public Schools
patient*

Hugh is an amazing dentist with an incredible eye for details and an insatiable pursuit of learning and improving. His commitment to dentistry, his patients, and the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry is virtually unparalleled.

—Sandy Roth

owner, ProSynergy Dental Communications

Dr. Flax has created the guidebook to cosmetic dentistry. Tons of great information to help the cosmetic dentistry consumer ask the right questions and make the right choices. He has taken a career worth of knowledge and distilled it in a way for the general public to become a more informed patient. A great resource for anyone looking to enhance their smile!

—Gary Radz, DDS

*author, lecturer on cosmetic dentistry
Denver, CO*

In a day where consumers are taking an active role in their own healthcare, both information and misinformation are readily available. Dr. Hugh Flax's publication both educates consumers about the importance of quality dental care and provides valuable, sound information to help consumers make informed decisions to identify the care they deserve. Dr. Flax's willingness to share personal and professional insight gained over the life of his career is a true gift to his readers.

—W. Johnston Rowe, Jr., DDS, AAACD

former AACD accreditation chair

I first moved to Atlanta almost thirty years ago. I needed a dentist and was recommended by several coworkers to see Dr. Flax. I became one of Doc's first patients when he opened his first office. Because he was a perfectionist, I knew that I had found the right dentist for me. I have watched him continue to learn new techniques and to study new aspects of dentistry and become a leader in his field. He and his fabulous staff have given me back my perfect, healthy, beautiful, and bright smile by putting veneers over the lines and hairline cracks that were left on my teeth by wearing braces for so many years when I was younger. He must have been born compassionate, caring, and gentle, as he has saved my smile through some harrowing dental emergencies and gave me confidence that "everything will be okay" when he finished the various procedures. So proud of [him] and the fine reputation that [he has] built.

—Jan McGeough

*patient
Atlanta, GA*

I have had the pleasure to work with Dr. Flax for nineteen years helping to give his patients the smile of their dreams with an unmatched patient experience. What I like about Dr. Flax is his dental hand skills, attention to detail, and quest for dental education and knowledge. Our relationship has been one of collaboration and fun throughout the years. Thank you Dr. Flax for your friendship and support.

—Wayne Payne, CDT, AAACD

*Payne Dental Lab
San Clemente, CA*

As a dedicated practitioner on a never-ending quest for deeper knowledge, Dr. Flax brings a rare, comprehensive perspective to his clinical teachings.

—Jeffrey W. Horowitz, DMD, FAGD, DASBA

*mentor, Kois Center
Conway, SC*

Dr. Hugh Flax is an extremely talented cosmetic dentist and is committed to giving 110 percent to his patients and his profession.

—Todd Snyder, DDS, FAACD, FIADFE

*cosmetic dentist, author, public speaker, entrepreneur
Laguna Niguel, CA*

I was in need of a complete set of upper teeth due to past poor dentistry and, yes, poor dental hygiene on my part as a result of very bad experiences as a child creating a real fear of dentists. As a result, I did a lot of research to pick where I would go for my “teeth in a day.”

I chose Flax Dental after much research and reading the on line reviews. I did not know anyone who had been to Flax Dental so I did not have any firsthand accounts. My first time there I was very nervous and really out right scared. Dr. Flax and his staff did their best to put me at ease and by the end of the visit, I felt assured enough to make another appointment and to keep it. From me, that is high praise indeed since previously I only went to the dentist when I was in so much pain, I didn't have a choice.

I highly recommend Dr. Flax and his whole team, including Dr. Brady and his team and Robin Johnson and his team. If you have a fear of dentists that have kept you from taking care of your teeth, I recommend Dr. Flax and team even if you don't need “teeth in a day.” My guess is your experience will be like mine and you could lose, or at the very least, lessen your fear of dentists. It has taken me a lifetime to find someone that I feel like I can see on a regular basis to keep my dental health in good shape, now restored through a team effort of myself and Flax Dental.

—E. Pizzati

patient

Before coming to see Dr. Flax, I had been dealing with chronic dental discomfort for around three years. During that time, I had two root canals, multiple gum treatments, and wore night guards to try to relieve the pain, but it never went away. Dr. Flax recommended I wear a deprogrammer at night for a few weeks and see if things improved, and they did. After that, he spent about an hour fixing the bite throughout my entire mouth, not just one area. I felt an improvement that day! A week later, I now have no dental pain and my periodontist noticed that my gums have improved as well—my six pocket is now a four. My only regret is not seeing Dr. Flax sooner to have this procedure done. It could have saved me years of discomfort, thousands of dollars, and unnecessary sadness and stress. When I close my mouth now, my jaw and teeth have a "happy cloud" to rest on instead of banging and knocking around. I can now spend each day focused on enjoying the day instead of worrying and wondering about my dental pain and how to make it go away. My quality of life is so much better and I love to smile now, thanks to Dr. Flax.

—Dr. Natalie Goldberger

patient

I have worked with Dr. Flax over the past eight years and have a great admiration for his attention to detail on each case he presents. As a dental technician, I value his support of the team approach and relationship between dentist, surgeon, and technician. He exudes a wealth of knowledge and experience in various areas of the industry, and is always ready to learn more and share said knowledge. One of the best to work with!

—Robin Johnson

*RJ Dental Creations
specializing in Teeth in a Day design*

a *Smile*

is Always in Style

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HOW TO LOOK GREAT
AND FEEL AMAZING

HUGH FLAX DDS, AAACD, MICOI

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Blessed and grateful to so many in my life who have supported my journey toward excellence and compassion:

To my dad, who was my hero and role model on so many levels.

To my family and friends, who give me strength, wisdom, and love.

To my Flax Dental team, who follow my passion.

To my many loyal patients, who have entrusted me with their smiles and longevity.

To my mentors around the world, who feed my curiosity of constant improvement.

To my spirit, that guides me on a path of kindness and integrity.

And to my beloved mom, who inspired me to become a dentist who makes a profound difference.



F O R E W O R D

She covered her mouth with her hand to make sure no one saw her laughing.

I'd watched her do it a thousand times. The first time, it seemed odd. But over the years, after I realized, she did it every time she laughed, I assumed it was because she'd been told: proper ladies don't throw their heads back with laughter. It made me sad because I believed she was afraid to express joy.

I couldn't have been more wrong.

Years later, looking at an old photograph, I saw the truth. Covering her mouth when she laughed wasn't because she was afraid of joy. It was because of her teeth.

The woman I'm describing was my mother-in-law. For the entire time I knew her, she covered her mouth when she laughed. I never understood why. Her teeth always seemed fine to me. In fact, they were quite straight. But after she died, I found some old photos of her in college. There she was standing beneath the University of Georgia arches in a beautiful white wool coat, flashing a big happy smile; she looked fabulous. Yet closer inspection of the small picture revealed that her teeth were misaligned. I asked my husband about it. He said, "My mother always had problems with her teeth. They were so bad she wound up getting dentures when she was in her fifties."

That's when the full weight of it hit me. The woman I knew, or the woman I thought I had known, the woman I assumed was afraid to express joy, had spent the first fifty years of her life embarrassed about her teeth. By the time she got dentures, the habit was so ingrained it had become part of her. She spent decades afraid to smile for photos or laugh out loud with her children. Even her wedding pictures showed a tight-lipped grin.

Her experience is not unique.

It's shocking that something as seemingly simple as your teeth can have such a dramatic impact on your life. In the course of our day-to-day lives, most of us don't think about how our teeth affect our relationships. Yet, as I saw with my mother-in-law, your smile is the way you connect. I have to wonder, over time, did her reluctance to smile affect her personality? I think it did.

Your smile is the way you convey joy, love, and acceptance. It communicates volumes to the people around you. When you don't feel confident about your smile, it affects everything about you. It affects the way you feel in any setting, and the way people respond to you.

As humans, we make snap judgments about each other based on appearances. We do it thousands of times a day. In his breakthrough book, *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*, Malcolm Gladwell revealed that our default wiring is to think without thinking. We size up situations and determine how we feel about someone based on nothing more than two-second observations.

Much of the time, our instincts are right. But sometimes, we're dead wrong. When a person doesn't smile, we make all kinds of negative assumptions. Very rarely do we question, *I wonder if it's their teeth?*

When Dr. Flax told me he was writing a book, I was delighted. I've known Hugh Flax for almost a decade. During that time I've watched him transform the smiles of thousands of people, including my own. His office walls are lined with pictures of beaming, smiling people who are now able to go out into the world confident and happy because their smile reflects the person they are inside.

I'm honored to write the foreword for this book, because I've seen firsthand just how much your teeth matter. Your teeth affect your personal relationships, and your professional success.

As a business coach, I work with CEOs, and I can tell you almost every single one of them has a great smile. To be clear, there's not a panel of judges who says we can't promote this person because they don't smile. You won't find a requirement for straight white teeth on a corporate job description (unless you're a tooth model). And no one ever got dinged on a performance review for crooked teeth.

Yet, people are evaluated every day. We assess people on their confidence, their ability to connect with others, and how comfortable we feel in their presence. All those things start with your smile.

I wish I could go back in time and help my mother-in-law reclaim her smile. I wish she had experienced the joy and confidence that comes from a healthy smile. And more than anything, I wish she had more unfiltered, no hands required, head back, full-throated laughs with the people she cared about.

But we can't go backward. All we can do is move forward.

When Dr. Flax says, "A smile is always in style," he's right. We all deserve a great smile. This book will help you find yours.

Lisa Earle McLeod

Author, *Selling with Noble Purpose*

Founder, McLeod & More, Inc.

INTRODUCTION

YOUR GUIDE TO A FEARLESS SMILE

My mom was scared about going to the dentist. If you imagine a tree in a hurricane, that's how much she shook. Oftentimes, she was given barbiturates to cope with her fears.

To make matters worse, my dad traveled for his job in the 1970s. Since Mom was always being sedated for her dental procedures, she had to drive herself to and from her appointments. Fortunately, the dentist's office was less than two miles away—and driving laws were less restrictive than they are today.

The good news was that she had a dentist who was a gentleman—and a gentle man. He rebuilt her mouth in about twelve months. I was a junior in high school at the time, and it was the first time in her life that she was able to smile and eat with confidence. I was so happy for her.

Seeing what my mom went through was the driving force behind me going into dentistry—a decision I made my senior year in high school. She not only had to deal with chronic discomfort, but there were a lot of psychological issues involved in going to the dentist so

often. I was deeply inspired to help people just like her to “slay the dragons of fear” so that going to the dentist wasn’t such an ordeal. In my mind, it became my destiny.

Unfortunately, that wasn’t the end of the story.

Fast-forward about eight years. Her dental problems had returned in the back of her mouth, with a vengeance. Many of the improvements that had been made were in great jeopardy.

Though she didn’t take the best care of her mouth, eating too many of her beloved Mounds candy bars and leaving the bathroom drawer full of unused floss, the biggest part of the problem was that she did not get the right coaching on how to prevent the problems in her mouth.

She was devastated about the prospect of facing a new battle to save her teeth. To make matters worse, this was happening while my dad was trying to help me pay for dental school. As he’d say, “Guess we all will have to work a little harder.” He was truly a saint dressed as a workaholic.

Over the course of her life, my mom had to have her mouth essentially remade four times. It seemed like she was always going to the dentist.

Shortly after graduating from Emory Dental School, I sat down with her while she was recovering from having a radical mastectomy to treat breast cancer. Though her life could have been in jeopardy, she talked often about “the gerbil wheel of dentistry” and how hard it was to keep her mouth healthy, while my dad was having to pay for her treatment over and over again. Her downward spiral was heart-breaking. On that spring day in 1986, she made me promise to *never* let anyone go through what she experienced—to be the best dentist I could be and be the best advocate possible for my patients.

It has been my solemn mission ever since to keep the promise I made to her.

Today, I have a thriving practice that is committed to excellence in cosmetic dentistry and wellness. I have spent my years since dental school continuously learning, improving, and bringing into my practice new tools and techniques, and for the last twenty years I have been asked to lecture around the world on the latest advances in dentistry. My goal is to help dentists to see the value of doing a job right, because I've seen too many patients whose procedures have failed. Too often, patients are even traveling for what they believe is a better price. While they may end up in the chair of a dentist who seems to have the best intentions, they are ultimately paying for treatment from someone who is not committed to excellence or who is reaching far beyond his or her capabilities.

I've poured my heart and soul into making dentistry a quest to "do it right." I'm very blessed that people have entrusted me all these many years to do that, and I want to see that legacy continue.

All these years, I've wanted patients to have not only a beautiful and believable smile, but also to bring joy to everyone for a long time by having them always love their appearance and how healthy their mouth feels.

A Love of Education

Since I didn't want to spend four years in undergraduate school—I didn't want my parents to have to spend any more money than they had to—I crushed through college to get into dental school early. Receiving a Phi Beta Kappa award as a junior made it hard to turn me down. I turned twenty-one the day before I entered dental school, and I found myself working with people twice my age. Interestingly,

many of my classmates nicknamed me “Rookie” because I was so young.

Very early on, I learned that dental school only teaches what is needed to pass the board and some crucial skills to have once school is over. But the real learning in dentistry comes after that. After graduating from Emory University Dental School in 1983, I participated in a General Practice Residency program at the Veteran’s Administration Medical Center in New Orleans, and then performed cosmetic material research at Louisiana State University School of Dentistry. Today, I am accredited by the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry (AACD) and am a longtime member, working my way up through the organization to become president from 2010 to 2011. I also founded the Georgia Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry, and I’ve pursued additional education and training through the Kois Center, American Academy of Implant Dentistry, the Academy of Laser Dentistry, and the Pankey Institute.

Over the years, I’ve been fortunate to have great mentors, including a man considered to be the father of cosmetic dentistry, Dr. Ronald Goldstein—learning dentistry from Dr. Goldstein is to my profession what learning how to hit a ball from Babe Ruth is to baseball.

Since graduating, I’ve continued to take far more than the required level of continuing education and give a dozen or more lectures each year—to staff and to other dental professionals—inspiring them and forcing me to continually raise my game. I really like seeing the light bulb go on for other dental professionals. That creates a ripple effect that helps patients get better treatment, but also helps dentists enjoy their practice. It helps them to avoid the steep learning curve that used to exist because of less training and fewer materials and technologies available to the industry. Those technolo-

gies—lasers, implants, digital scans and models, and more—allow us to stay at the forefront of this ever-evolving industry. While adding technologies to my practice has allowed for a broader range of experience and capabilities, I also know when to collaborate with other professionals to ensure a patient has the best experience, and best outcomes, they can have.

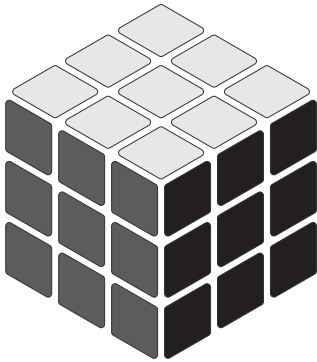
An Oasis for Patients

Having seen what my mom and what many of patients have been through, I have made sure from day one that my practice is an “oasis” for patients who haven’t been treated properly, or who are fearful of going to the dentist. People don’t deserve to be abused or treated harshly while in the dentist’s chair, regardless of the condition of their mouth. Everyone deserves a healthy, beautiful smile.

My team and I hear some mind-boggling stories about how patients have been treated in other practices, and I tend to believe many of them because of what I see on their x-rays and other tests. Often, what they really need is the right guidance, the right strategies to have a much better chance at having a mouth like mine. You see, even though my mom—and my dad—did not have healthy mouths, I’m the opposite. I have not had a filling in my mouth since I was six years old. The difference? I had a great dentist who taught me preventive dentistry. Plus, my dad also swore when I had five small cavities at age six that those would be last cavities ever in my mouth—and that kind of vow coming from my dad, a big, imposing man (built like Tony Soprano and talked like Clint Eastwood), pretty much scared me into having a healthy mouth for life. Fortunately, the dentist was able to preserve a lot of tooth structure when filling those early cavities, so my teeth have remained strong all these years.

What's also different about my practice is how we look beyond the surface—literally. When we see problems in the mouth, we not only want to repair the damage, we want to *find out what's causing the damage*. We want to understand the risk factors that patients have that may be causing bad habits, or poor functionality, or why there is so much wear and tear. In the chapters ahead, I'll discuss some of these factors to help you see how cavities, broken teeth, and other problems in the mouth may be the result of your health or your environment.

There are so many variables involved in correcting problems and risk factors in the mouth that everything must be taken into account when determining treatment—like pieces of a puzzle. I



think of each patient's treatment like solving a Rubik's Cube color by color, a concept I learned from one of my mentors, Dr. John Kois, in Seattle, Washington—each patient's risk factors must be solved with a customized treatment plan to create a long-term, stable mouth. As a result,

we commonly have patients comment that they knew their smile would be improved, but they did not realize how much the treatment would improve their health and bite overall. In the chapters ahead, I'll share some of these stories with you. In some cases, I've changed the patient's name to protect their privacy.

This book is for anyone who wants to improve their smile for health reasons, to build confidence, or whether they simply want to be happier with the person they see in the mirror. I want to help you understand the importance of a better smile and why it pays to do it

right the first time. Furthermore, I want you to see what it means to get a return on your investment.

Just as importantly, I also hope what you will take away from this book is an idea of how to care for yourself every day; a comprehensive understanding of the cosmetic dentistry options available, if and when you would need them; and a desire to improve your smile and your entire world.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A GREAT SMILE

Cosmetic dentistry covers a wide range of treatment options, from simple whitening procedures to full-mouth reconstruction. Without a real understanding of the value of cosmetic dentistry, many people often put off having a dentist look inside their mouth and come up solutions. However, waiting longer can sometimes make treatment even more challenging.

That was part of the issue with Tracy. The first time Tracy came to see me, she was unhappy with the way her teeth looked. They were yellow and worn down because she had major bite issues. She also had deficiencies in her enamel—the result of genetics—which had weakened her teeth and bone. In addition, she wanted a smile that she could be proud of, so we put together a treatment plan that would involve pretty extensive work, but would allow us to strengthen the foundation of her mouth along with many of her teeth.

Unfortunately, she decided that the plan was not within her budget, so she sought out less-costly treatment from other dentists and settled on one out of town that a family member recommended. With nothing in the way of a blueprint, he gave her a new smile with

a row of crowns that were bulky and too uniform to look like the real thing. They looked like she had a row of Chiclets gum instead of teeth.

By the time she came back to see me, Tracy was beside herself because she had invested so much in her smile, and it still wasn't something she was proud to see in the mirror. In fact, the next time I saw Tracy, her gums were inflamed and her bite was worse than ever and painful. Plus, when we took x-rays, we could see that a lot of the crowns were not sealed properly, which meant she was destined for some real problems with bacteria and breakage.

Unfortunately, we had to start from scratch with Tracy because we were unable to obtain any of her information from the dentist who had treated her. We ultimately did what equated to an “extreme makeover” on Tracy. We had to remove all her crowns to treat her for a bacteria avalanche that had begun, straighten her bite while she wore prototype crowns, and then place new, customized-to-her, permanent crowns on her teeth.

Since she had already been burned with the previous treatment, she was very particular with the plan we put together for her. But in the end, she got exactly what she wanted—a smile that she was proud to show to the world.

Tracy's treatment has lasted as well. Since her treatment ended in 2008, I've seen her for regular cleanings and some minor maintenance. But all in all, since her care has been completed, she's lived her life as a working mother with a much happier smile and healthier mouth.

“You get what you pay for! After all I have been through, I am blessed that Dr. Flax is a great dentist with integrity. Thankfully, I have always trusted his abilities to serve my needs and solve my

problems successfully. What a huge bonus that he is also very considerate and compassionate.”

—Tracy

See Tracy's progress in the before and after photo section.

Cosmetic Dentistry— Start with the Low-Hanging Fruit

Quite often, people put off addressing problems in their mouth that can be fixed with cosmetic dentistry, because they don't understand just what cosmetic dentistry is about. Not everyone has to go through what Tracy did to enjoy the effects of cosmetic dentistry. Sometimes very simple procedures like whitening, bonding, and contouring can make a big difference in having a great smile—what I call the “low-hanging fruit.” It all depends on the patient and their needs.

Everyone is different. Some patients are like Tracy and need a full-mouth reconstruction. Many may need the conservative “low-hanging fruit.” Others need procedures to restore the function to their mouth before we can finish up with cosmetics; these patients might have severe wear and need teeth built up, or they might have some crowding and need their teeth straightened, or they may even be missing one or more teeth that need to be replaced.

There's no one-size-fits-all for every patient, which is what you'll find with a lot of practices—they just plug in a solution without trying to preserve any existing, healthy teeth.

If you were to compare what I'm saying to plastic surgery, it would be a little like comparing a Botox procedure to a full-blown facelift. Sometimes, with cosmetic dentistry, just a few nips and tucks—whitening or bonding and shaping—is all it takes to refresh and rejuvenate your smile. I'll talk about the types of procedures that we do at my practice in the chapters ahead.

Too many people put off having a cosmetic dentist look at their mouth because they think it's too expensive or they're beyond help. But, very often, all it takes is a little strategy and some very predictable procedures to give you the smile you've been longing for.

For now, let me share with you a few reasons why you should consider cosmetic dentistry today, rather than waiting.

A Great Smile: The Window to the Soul

When you smile, it allows people to see that joy and confidence that exists inside of you. If you have a great sense of humor, if you love to laugh, you have to have a smile that is ideal for showing that side of you to the world.

But I've had many patients that have kept that personality bottled up inside. Why? Because they're so embarrassed by their teeth that they never open their mouth and show the world their smile. They may see or hear something they think is really funny, but they refuse to show their smile because they think it makes them look bad. Everyone wants to look good, and teeth are a big part of how a person appears on the outside. A bright, shiny smile can dazzle people from across the room.

A number of studies have found that a beautiful smile can make you appear to be more attractive, and, according to research by Beall Research & Training of Chicago, your smile can even make you appear smarter, more interesting, and even successful and wealthy.¹

When the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry (AACD) had an independent study conducted, the results were eye opening.

1 "Can a New Smile Make You Appear More Successful and Intelligent?" American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry, Consumer Studies news release, accessed February 4, 2019, <https://aacd.com/surveys>.

Adults in the study were shown photos of people who had undergone cosmetic dentistry. The respondents were not told they were judging a person's smile; instead, they were asked to judge the people in the photos on certain characteristics, including attractiveness, intelligence, happiness, career success, friendliness, kindness, wealth, and whether they would be popular with the opposite sex.² Here are findings from this and other studies:

A confidence booster. A flawed smile was perceived to be a sign of less confidence, according to participants in an AACD survey. Twenty-five percent said that's what they saw in an imperfect smile compared to someone with what they viewed as "perfect" teeth.³

A career booster. Nearly all Americans in an AACD study (99.7 percent) believed that a smile was an important asset. Some 74 percent thought an unattractive smile could potentially hurt a person's chances at having a successful career.⁴

A more appealing feature to the opposite sex. Ninety-six percent of respondents to an AACD study thought an attractive smile made a person more appealing to members of the opposite sex.⁵ Another study also supports the latter finding: a Harris Interactive survey of more than two thousand adults found that nearly three quarters of them (74 percent) prefer to kiss someone with a nice smile over someone with crooked

2 Ibid.

3 "A Picture Perfect Smile: The Secret to Attractiveness at Any Age," American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry, Consumer Studies news release, accessed February 4, 2019, <https://aacd.com/surveys>.

4 Ibid.

5 "Can a New Smile Make You Appear More Successful and Intelligent?" op. cit.

teeth, and 18 percent of those surveyed thought that an imperfect smile was keeping them from finding a mate.⁶

A most memorable feature. When asked about smiles in the photos, respondents to an AACD study said that they most remembered aspects like tooth color, straightness, cleanliness, and sparkle, and that traits like missing or crooked teeth, visible decay, and stains made a smile unattractive.⁷ When asked about memorable features, nearly half of participants (48 percent) in another study said the smile was what they remembered most when meeting someone for the first time—more than what a person said, what they were wearing, or their scent.⁸

A feature to improve. When asked about their own smiles, most people in an AACD study said that “whiter and brighter teeth” was the one thing they would like to improve.⁹

An asset when aging. Nearly half (around 45 percent) of participants in an AACD study said a smile is a person’s most attractive feature as a person ages, more so than the body (10 percent), hair (6 percent) or legs (5 percent). More than half of the people age fifty or over said that a smile was the most enduring feature as a person ages. Even in younger generations, 39 percent of eighteen- to forty-nine-year-olds found a smile to be a long-term attractive feature.¹⁰

6 “For Today’s Singles, the Secret to a Better Love Life May Be a Better Smile,” *PRNewswire*, September 9, 2013, accessed February 5, 2019, www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/for-todays-singles-the-secret-to-a-better-love-life-may-be-a-better-smile-222947031.html.

7 “Can a New Smile Make You Appear More Successful and Intelligent?” *op. cit.*

8 “A Picture Perfect Smile: The Secret to Attractiveness at Any Age,” *op. cit.*

9 “Can a New Smile Make You Appear More Successful and Intelligent?” *op. cit.*

10 “A Picture Perfect Smile: The Secret to Attractiveness at Any Age,” *op. cit.*

An even greater portion of the people surveyed felt that spending money to have a youthful smile was well worth the investment. Some 84 percent of women and 75 percent of men said they would be willing to invest in treatment for a younger smile, and people aged thirty to thirty-nine were more willing to do so: 88 percent of the people in this age group said they would spend money to improve their looks.¹¹ Sixty-two percent of people surveyed said they would spend money to improve the quality of their teeth.

There you have it:

- **more confidence**
- **more approachable**
- **sexier**
- **higher self-esteem**

That's what people think when they see a great smile. If your smile is less than ideal, it can really affect how you feel about yourself and how you greet the world.

These surveys prove something that I see every day: A great smile can give you a whole new energy. I see people every day who are embarrassed by their smile. Sometimes, they don't even want to show me their teeth—and I'm the one they've come to for help.

But after we work some magic on them—we take x-rays and photos, create a blueprint, and then apply the new design to a person's smile—it's almost like pulling the string on a talking doll. They're a totally changed person, ready to talk, laugh, and go out into the world.

11 Ibid.

First Impressions— No Longer Just In-Person

With the rise of social media and selfies, everybody wants to look good these days. That's because first impressions no longer happen only face-to-face. In today's digital world, your smile can be seen around the world in an instant. With a just few clicks, virtually millions of people can see you—and your smile—for the first time. That's why a winning smile is so important for helping you make a positive first impression.

People have developed a kind of a defensive pattern so that nobody sees a flaw in their appearance. They'll comb their hair, tilt their head, posture their lips—all in a certain way. That may work for a portrait or even a selfie, but you can't really fake it when meeting people or having conversations—especially considering that 60 percent of the weight of a face is composed of your smile.¹² With your smile being such a prominent feature, it's no wonder it makes such an immediate impact—whether consciously or subconsciously—on the people you meet.

When you can fully express yourself, your whole life changes. Being able to do that opens doors in terms of your overall well-being and happiness. And cosmetic dentistry can make that difference. With a great smile, you can be authentic with your emotions—you can let it all hang out and not have to worry that you're being judged by your appearance.

Too often, I have patients that say, “Just pull them all out.” That's how frustrated they are with their teeth and their smile. They're

12 “Best Face Forward: Making GREAT First Impressions in a Digital Age,” American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry, Consumer Studies news release, accessed February 4, 2019, <https://aacd.com/surveys>.

resigned to living with their decaying, disheveled, yellowing teeth, and they're despondent about their appearance. But I don't believe that's the answer. I know the importance of permanent teeth, and we do what we can to save them.

Understanding our patients' needs begins by talking to them about their concerns and what they envision for their ideal smile. It's very illuminating to be able to get into that collaborative mode with patients—they tell me what they want, what they don't want. Many times, what they tell me is they want something that looks natural, that's not going to shock everyone or "glow in the dark." Some people want a whole new image, others want to return their smile to what it was when they were younger. Especially when someone wants to turn back the clock, we ask for a picture of them from when they were younger. We want to see what they're envisioning, whether we can turn back the clock that far or not.

Then there are patients that don't know what they want, they just hate the way they look. With only that information to go on, we start by talking about the color of their teeth and what might be appropriate for them considering the whites of their eyes, skin complexion, hair color, and age.

Depending on those and other factors, we'll look at the shapes of their teeth, the number of teeth showing, the condition and symmetry of their gums. The truth is, we're not going to return a seventy-year-old woman's smile back to what it was in high school, but we can certainly do some things to shave off many years.

Proven: A Healthy Smile Adds Years to Your Life

In addition to how a smile looks and helps you present yourself, a great smile is a healthy smile. Oral health is just as important as overall wellness—in fact, the two are very connected. Problems in the mouth can signal a problem somewhere else in the body, and when a person’s mouth is not healthy, it can actually affect the health of their body.

The mouth is filled with bacteria, most of which is not harmful. These bacteria produce acids, which can be washed away by saliva in the mouth. It’s a system of balance that is controlled, in part, by regular brushing and flossing. Good oral hygiene along with the body’s natural defenses can keep harmful bacteria in the mouth in check. When those bacteria get out of control because of a lack of proper oral hygiene, or because of reduced saliva from taking certain medications, then you can begin to have problems such as gum disease and tooth decay.

Some diseases can lower the body’s defenses, making it easier to develop inflammation in the mouth. That can lead to periodontitis, which is a severe form of gum disease.

Studies have begun to link the inflammation and infection from poor oral health to problems such as heart disease, premature birth, and low birth weights.¹³ Links have also been found between conditions such as diabetes—people with uncontrolled blood sugar levels often develop gum disease, and when a person has gum disease, it can be harder to control their diabetes. It’s a two-way street.¹⁴ Other

13 Mayo Clinic Staff, “Oral Health: A Window to Your Overall Health,” *Mayo Clinic*, November 1, 2018, accessed February 5, 2019, www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/dental/art-20047475%20--.

14 Ibid.

health problems that can lead to problems in the mouth include Alzheimer's disease, oral cancer, HIV/AIDS, eating disorders, rheumatoid arthritis, and osteoporosis (because of the drugs used to treat it).

HOW CAN I PROTECT MY ORAL HEALTH?

To protect your oral health, practice good oral hygiene every day:

- Brush your teeth at least twice a day with fluoride toothpaste.
- Floss daily.
- Eat a healthy diet and limit between-meal snacks.
- Replace your toothbrush every three to four months, or sooner if bristles are frayed.
- Schedule regular dental checkups and cleanings.
- Avoid tobacco use.

Advantages of Having a Healthy Smile

A healthy smile allows you to eat healthier foods. Stronger teeth and bone let you chew with more power. That's what's needed to grind and shred food. One of my more challenging cases involved a young woman with some congenital issues that required her to have major surgeries just to get the foundation of her mouth in a condition where we could begin to build teeth. Without having teeth that were

strong enough to chew healthy food, she had begun gaining a lot of weight—and she was only twenty-two years old.

A lack of healthy teeth can create so many consequences in your life that they can snowball:

- You can't smile.
- Then you can't chew.
- Your health starts deteriorating.
- You may become overweight and diabetic.
- You can't sleep well.
- That makes you lethargic and keeps you from competing in the business world or enjoying a social life.

Your life just goes down a rabbit hole.

If your bite doesn't fit together—the surfaces don't fit together or the teeth aren't aligned properly—then you can't chew efficiently, forcing you to favor one side or one area of the mouth. You may find yourself in a lot of pain, and you won't know why. That happened to one of my patients. She was frustrated because she had strong teeth, but had undergone several root canals. “I don't know if I really needed those root canals,” she told me. “It's just like my bite just hasn't been right.” I'll talk more about the bite in chapter 3.

Missing teeth can also lead to bone loss over time. If adjacent teeth have to work harder because of a missing tooth, that overload can start to cause breakdown. Implants, which substitute for missing teeth, can be just as damaging since they fuse to the bone. Without any sort of shock absorber, the bite can become more sensitive in that area. In my practice, I place implants for teeth that are beyond health, and I'll talk more about that in chapter 8.

When your teeth are stable, you don't have to worry about emergencies. You don't suddenly have to call up the dentist and take a day off work to have swelling in your mouth or an abscessed gum treated. A patient came to see me one time to help with a tooth she had glued back into her mouth—she was going to be in a professional debate that day, and was so desperate when her tooth dislodged that morning that she just glued it back in. By the time she came to see me, her mouth was in such a state that she needed a full reconstruction. Now, she's a different person—and wouldn't think of using Super Glue in her mouth.

Tracy—A Happy, Healthy, Worry-Free Mouth

For Tracy, the road to a healthy mouth began after she first took a detour. Today, she has a mouth that is no longer painful, and no longer an overwhelming part of her everyday concerns as a working mother.

The moral of the story is this: A stable, healthy mouth gives you peace of mind. You don't have to worry about the pain—physical or financial. You don't have to deal with discomfort. You don't have to miss work or resort to desperate measures. You're able to eat and enjoy life—and smile about it.

In the upcoming chapters, I'll talk about different cosmetic procedures that can help you have a smile you'll be proud to wear and that will help you have a happier life.

For now, let's look at the most conservative cosmetic dentistry option—teeth whitening.

SMILE ON!

What you can do now to get started:

- Research dentists who are accredited with the AACD.
- Brush and floss properly to keep stains off teeth and keep food from between teeth.
- Schedule a professional dental cleaning and checkup.

