

**Seven
Common
Mistakes
in Choosing
a Cosmetic
Dentist**



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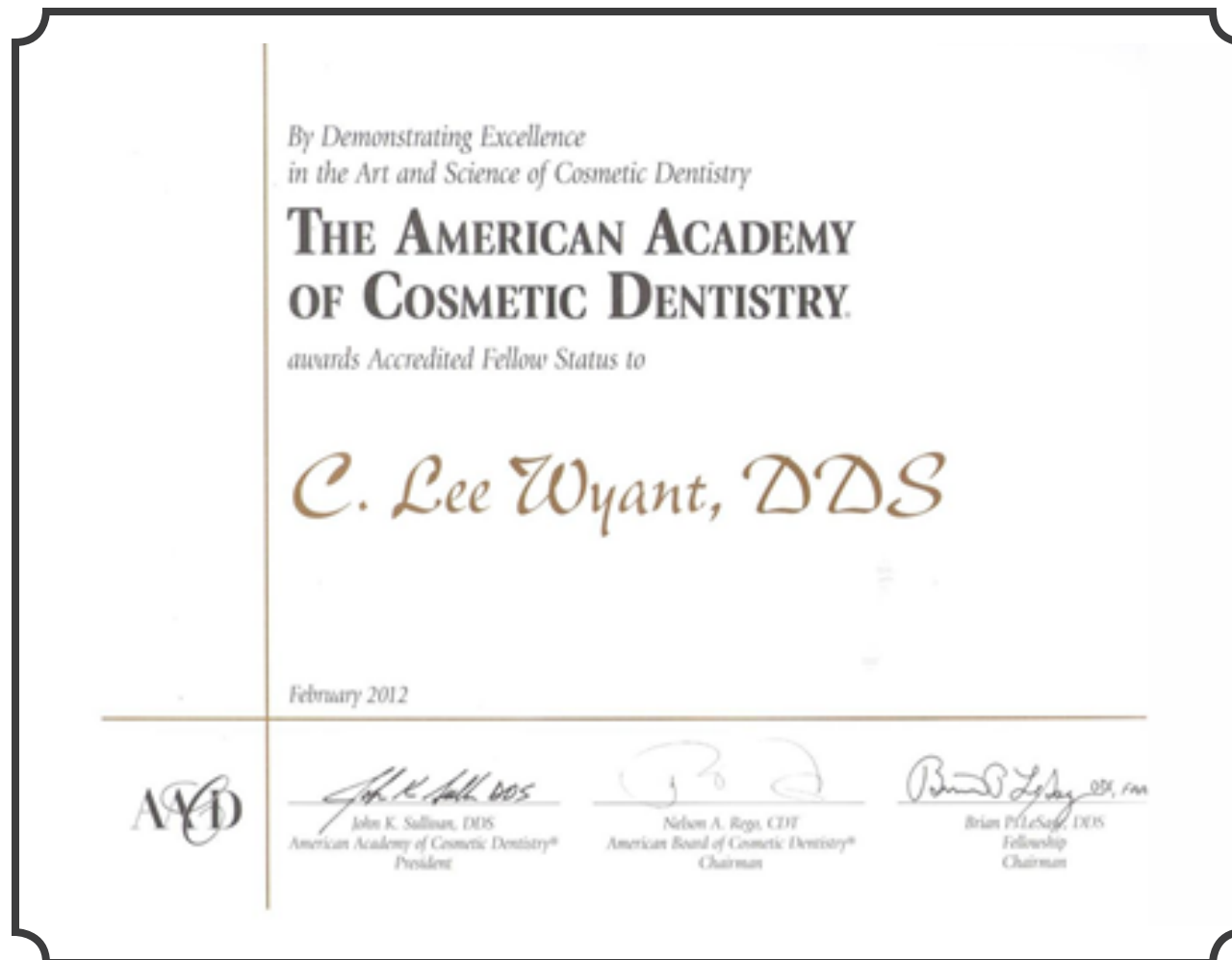
*“Every time you smile at someone,
it is an action of love,
a gift to that person,
a beautiful thing.”*

– Mother Teresa

Seven Common Mistakes in Choosing a Cosmetic Dentist

It is much easier to prevent a mistake than to fix one. Cosmetic dentistry takes precision and skill. If not executed well, patients are left with regret and a smile that leaves a lot to be desired. According to the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry, more than 25 percent of annual spending on cosmetic dentistry is doled out to dentists who are asked to fix subpar results from a previous dental visit. When performed by skilled hands, cosmetic dentistry can produce excellent results. When executed poorly, it can cause a lifetime of pain and leave patients devastated.

Searching for a qualified cosmetic dentist is a daunting task. In part because many dentists call themselves “cosmetic dentists” when, in fact, they have not been properly trained. Unfortunately, any dentist can legally call themselves a “cosmetic” dentist as it’s an unregulated term. To confuse patients even more, dentists often claim they are a city’s “premiere” cosmetic dentist or that they’re the “best” or “world-renowned”. These terms aren’t regulated and many dentists like it that way. Just because a



dentist performs teeth-whitening services or composite (white) fillings does not mean they are a trained, skilled or accredited cosmetic dentist.

What does “perfect” mean to you? Beauty is in the eye of the beholder and what you want for your smile should be discussed in detail with a qualified cosmetic dentist. The goal should not be to leave you with big, “too-white” teeth, but rather a beautiful, natural-looking style that people believe you were born with.

Cosmetic dentistry done right should be undetectable. Beautiful porcelain veneers are not cookie-cutter, perfect teeth. Each patient will have a different definition of what “beautiful” means to them. Some may want very white teeth while others want a more subtle result. Some patients may desire all of their teeth to be uniform in shape, while others want a more natural looking smile. To help patients achieve the best smile for them, a respectable and accredited cosmetic dentist should – and will – listen to and understand their patients’ desires and then work with those patients, educating them on how to achieve a beautiful smile that both the patient and the dentist will be proud to share.

According to a survey by the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry, nearly 50 percent of people believe a person’s smile is the most memorable feature after they first meet someone. Choosing a talented, qualified and accredited cosmetic dentist can have a life-changing impact on your appearance and confidence. If you want a truly striking smile, there are a few things you need to know before you find the cosmetic dentist who’s right for you. A lot of dentists out there claim to be cosmetic dentists when in fact they are not accredited by the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry. The best cosmetic dentists are highly skilled, experienced and accredited in cosmetic dentistry. If you don’t know what you’re looking for when choosing a cosmetic dentist, finding the right one can be difficult. The goal of this chapter is to arm you with the knowledge you need to find a cosmetic dentist who can give you the smile you’re looking for.

MISTAKE #1

Confusing a Family Dentist with an Expert, Experienced, Accredited Cosmetic Dentist

A jack of all trades, master of none family dentist is very different from an experienced, expert, qualified cosmetic dentist. Any dentist – whether they're just out of school or they've graduated years ago but haven't had any cosmetic dental training since – can call themselves a cosmetic dentist. Many general dentists try to offer at least some cosmetic dentistry in their general dentistry practice. But be forewarned. Just because they offer it does not mean they are well-trained or highly skilled at performing many – or even any – cosmetic dentistry procedures. If you needed back surgery or brain surgery, you wouldn't go to your general family doctor to get it. You'd find an expert in the field. The same goes for cosmetic dentistry. When you're looking for an expert, you want someone who has formal training, ample experience and who works in the field every day.

Know what you're looking for. You want a skilled cosmetic dentist – not just someone who has impressive

endeavors and interests. Don't confuse worthy achievements with the discipline of cosmetic dentistry. Having a noteworthy position within a dental organization, practicing forensic dentistry, laser dentistry, sedation dentistry or performing charitable work are all wonderful accomplishments but none of that means they are an expert in cosmetic dentistry. Remember that anyone can say they are a cosmetic dentist. You want a cosmetic dentist who has been accredited by the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry.

Many family and general dentists will attempt an occasional cosmetic procedure when the opportunity presents itself. But beautiful cosmetic dentistry is an art form. Many dentists are general dentists who just simply have not performed enough procedures to master the art. When looking for a cosmetic dentist, you need to ask questions. If you want porcelain veneers, ask the dentist you're considering how many veneers he or she has placed. A cosmetic dentist who does many procedures a year will have the experience and expertise to change your smile for the better.

The difference between a real cosmetic dentist and a general dentist is that the cosmetic dentist has been trained to create exactly what you're looking for: a

beautiful smile. A cosmetic dentist has developed a strong artistic eye and has sharpened his or her skills through education and experience. Additionally, a true cosmetic dentist has a reputation to uphold in the field of cosmetic dentistry. General dentists are often more focused on simply ensuring that your teeth work as they should as opposed to ensuring that you end up with a beautiful and natural-looking smile.

MISTAKE #2

Selecting a Cosmetic Dentist Who Lacks Credentials

Though their patients believe otherwise, many well-known dentists are not accredited cosmetic dentists. Many patients have been left with nothing more than disappointment and a bungled procedure after visiting a dentist who only found out later that their dentist was not accredited by the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry and had no formal training in cosmetic dentistry at all.

Unfortunately, many dentists who have no relevant training or significant experience claim themselves

to be cosmetic dentists. But how many actually are cosmetic dentists? The American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry has 400 accredited members. The highest credential earned in the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry is an Accredited Fellow. Only 60 cosmetic dentists in the United States have earned this distinction.

It is important to note that there is no specialization in cosmetic dentistry while in dental school. Many dental schools don't teach any courses specifically devoted to cosmetic dentistry. The schools that do teach cosmetic dentistry courses usually offer just a few introductory classes.

Why are credentials important for a cosmetic dentist? To become an expert in cosmetic dentistry, it takes a lot more than just a pronouncement from a dentist that he or she is one. To become a cosmetic dentistry expert, it takes a comprehensive post-graduate training program in cosmetic dentistry as well as skill, a creative eye and years of experience. When you look around, you'll find very few dentists meet these standards. Extensive training is vital to learn and perfect the latest techniques for the best results.

When looking for a dentist with credentials, you want a dentist who has accreditation from the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry (AACD). The American Dental Association does not currently have a recognized specialty in cosmetic dentistry. The AACD was formed in 1984 by visionaries who formed the organization as a way to fill the need for credentialing dentists in this area of expertise. Currently, the AACD consists of more than 6,000 dental professionals, laboratory technicians, educators and researchers from 70 countries around the world. It is the largest international dental organization devoted to the science of cosmetic dentistry.

The AACD mission statement reads, “The American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry is dedicated to advancing excellence in the art and science of cosmetic dentistry and encouraging the highest standards of ethical conduct and responsible patient care.” To be accredited by the AACD, dentists must go through a meticulous program and complete many continuing education courses in cosmetic dentistry. After they are tested on the courses, dentists are then required to submit several cosmetic cases to be judged by a panel of cosmetic dentistry experts.

What you need to know about dentists who belong to the AACD:

There are several levels of membership within the AACD. There are General Members, Participating Members, Sustaining members, Accreditation Candidates, Accredited Members and Accredited Fellows.

- An **Accredited Fellow** is the highest credential a dentist can earn within the AACD. Accredited Fellows have to be accredited for several years and must then present an additional 45 cosmetic cases to be judged by a panel of experts. They are highly qualified and highly trained cosmetic dentists who are undoubtedly the best candidates to give you the smile you want. Currently only 60 dentists have earned this distinction in the United States.
- An **Accredited Member** has to present and pass five different types of cosmetic cases as well as pass oral and written exams. There are about 160,000 dentists in the United States. Of those, 400 are accredited by the AACD.
- **General members, Participating Members and Sustaining Members** have paid dues to belong in the AACD to take advantage of educational opportunities but have not presented any cosmetic

dental cases be judged by a panel of experts. Even non-dentists can be members of the AACD. You need to know what level of membership your dentist has achieved.

You can easily find out if a dentist is accredited by the AACD by visiting www.aacd.com.

An **AACD Accredited Member** is in at least the 95th percentile of dentists according to skill and expertise in cosmetic dentistry. An **AACD Accredited Fellow** is even more elite. Patients may wonder if there are any cosmetic dentists out there who are not AACD accredited, but who can still perform excellent results. If there are, they are few and far between. Identifying those few excellent cosmetic dentists who may not have AACD accreditation is nearly impossible for the average consumer.

What about prosthodontists? Some prosthodontists inaccurately say that they specialize in cosmetic dentistry, when in fact they are a crown and bridge specialist trained in replacing missing teeth. They can be excellent at what they do, but they are not cosmetic dentistry specialists. Don't be fooled by a prosthodontist who claims to be a cosmetic dental specialist. It is a difficult dilemma when a patient meets a dentist

who claims to be an expert in cosmetic dentistry and is so convincing that the patient believes he or she has found the perfect dentist to create a beautiful smile for them. Sometimes these dentists will say they have extensive experience and they don't need a professional organization to validate their expertise. A dentist can be very convincing that he is indeed the best cosmetic dentist around, which can leave unwitting patients bitterly disappointed with the end result. To ensure you're in the best hands, it's essential to find a cosmetic dentist who is accredited by the AACD.

More organizations are popping up that offer a short-cut to "Credentials" and "Awards" in cosmetic dentistry. To an uninformed patient looking for help, these credentials can sound impressive. Often these awards are given merely as a marketing tool and sometimes they're won by the same dentists running the competition. Be wary of any dentist who touts medals and awards in cosmetic dentistry.

Remember that any dentist can become a member of the AACD, but only those who receive accreditation have gone through significant education and training, presented cases in front of a panel of experts to

be judged and passed oral and written tests. Bottom line: If you want a cosmetic dentist with real credentials, look for one who has AACD Accreditation or Fellowship.

Along those same lines, be cautious of dentists who have a list of initials after their names. This is one case where more is not better. Some dentists are simply trying to impress potential patients and assume you won't notice that these initials aren't from the right – or reputable – organizations. Sometimes, the initials come from an organization that provides them for little more than a paid fee. If a dentist says he or she is a Fellow or Accredited, always ask where they obtained that accreditation. Accredited Members and Fellows in the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry are required to attend regular continuing education courses and meetings to maintain their credentials.

MISTAKE #3

Not Reviewing the Before & After Portfolio

An experienced cosmetic dentist should have a photographic portfolio of before and after cases on a variety of cosmetic dental procedures to show

prospective patients. This portfolio can be displayed online in the practice website or at the dental office in a photographic album. Few or no photos is a red flag that shouldn't be ignored. Before and after photos of whitening or replacing a silver filling in a back tooth with a white filling is not a cosmetic dental portfolio. As discussed in Chapter 2: How are Veneers Used?, the cosmetic dentist should be able to show prospective patients the many different applications of porcelain veneers and show a completed case very similar to the patient's current condition. Nothing establishes more confidence and credibility in the patient's eyes than a cosmetic dentist who has provided the same treatment they are seeking under very similar circumstances and achieved outstanding results.

It is important to ask several questions of the cosmetic dentist if shown a portfolio. Did you provide the treatment shown in the portfolio? Professionally produced photo albums of cosmetic dentistry can be purchased for patient education. Obviously a dentist telling the patient that the treatment showcased in an album as their own is unethical. Also saying nothing and just letting the patient assume the dentist did the treatment in the purchased album is considered a questionable practice. Another question to ask

would be “Have these photos been digitally altered?” Though global alteration like cropping or adjusting the brightness of an image is acceptable, altering the actual look of the dentistry is unacceptable.

MISTAKE #4

Choosing a Cosmetic Dentist Based on Price

It’s great to be a bargain shopper, but the saying “you get what you pay for” is usually true. And it’s especially true when it comes to cosmetic dentistry. If you’re looking for a cosmetic dentist, then you probably want one thing: a beautiful smile. If that’s your goal, it seems silly to risk the results just to save a few dollars. This is one area where the words of Benjamin Franklin ring true. Franklin wisely said, “The bitterness of poor quality is remembered long after the sweetness of low price is forgotten.”

Needless to say, if your smile reconstruction turns out less than what you hoped for, you will regret ever having it done and regret every penny you paid. Porcelain veneers that are high quality and done by a skilled dentist can dramatically change your smile for the better for years to come. It is one of the best

investments you can make. If you end up with cheap veneers just to save a few bucks, you’ll be disappointed in the results and may also be paying to repair or replace them shortly thereafter. If you’re unhappy with the shape and/or color of your veneers, are short term savings worth it? Is it worth saving a few bucks if your porcelain veneers stain or crack a few months after receiving them? Think through what a beautiful smile is worth to you and don’t shortchange yourself by falling into the hands of an unskilled, “low cost” or “discount” dentist.

A beautiful smile is a great way to make a first impression. You should not choose a dentist who is going to cut corners when it comes to your smile. A dentist who offers deep discounts on cosmetic dentistry is likely hurting for business or is otherwise in a volume-based practice. Discounted dental prices should be a red flag that may very well indicate you have not found a skilled cosmetic dentist. A dentist who offers low cost dentistry has to find ways to reduce their costs so they can offer those low, low prices. This can be done by using lower-quality materials, cutting corners on technique or they can make up the cost in volume, like a mill practice. Sometimes a dentist may offer you a good deal because he or she

wants to gain more experience and training. Do you really want to be a guinea pig? The dentist may also be using a cheaper lab, cheaper materials and/or cheaper equipment. Very often, the dentists offering big discounts have not invested the time or money in extensive training required to become an expert cosmetic dentist.

Choosing a quality dentist is a much smarter investment. An accredited cosmetic dentist's fees and prices are based on experience and skill. The quality of cosmetic dentistry varies, but depends on a few things:

- **Skill and Experience:** A cosmetic dentist will evaluate his or her patients, talk about appropriate options with their patients, and design and reconstruct a beautiful smile that meets high standards.
- **The Master Ceramist:** The ceramist hand-makes the wax-up of the teeth and hand-makes the porcelain restorations. Often, the master ceramist hand-paints and hand-fires each restoration several times to match the shape, size and color determined by the cosmetic dentist.

- **Quality of the Materials:** The technology and materials used should be top notch for the best possible smile. This includes the latest and highest quality bonding agents, curing lights, cavity detection tools, restoration handling, digital X-rays for proper placement and high-tech photography. All of these tools are essential to an excellent outcome.

“Quality is never an accident; it is always the result of high intention, sincere effort, intelligent direction, and skillful execution; it represents the wise choice of many alternatives.”

– William A. Foster

MISTAKE #5

Selecting a Cosmetic Dentist Based on Dental Insurance Coverage

It may seem tempting, but choosing a dentist to perform your smile makeover because he or she participates with your insurance can lead to unsatisfactory

results. There are very few, if any, expert accredited cosmetic dentists who are members of any preferred provider insurance networks. The term “preferred provider” simply means “cheap provider” to insurance companies. Insurance companies want dentists to be a part of their preferred provider network. The insurance companies tell a dentist they’ll keep their chairs filled if the dentist can cut costs and reduce their fees to comply with the insurance company’s discounted fee schedule. But expert, accredited cosmetic dentists are not able to consistently provide beautiful high-quality smiles if they use cheap materials, laboratories, technologies, and pay their staff low salaries.

Accredited cosmetic dentists also have to continue their education keeping abreast of the latest tools and techniques in cosmetic dentistry. These accredited dentists do – and should – charge appropriate and fair fees to make the investment of all that extra education worthwhile. An excellent cosmetic dentist is also typically not hurting for business so they won’t need to submit to deals offered by insurance companies.

And really – would you want a dentist to reconstruct your smile just because he or she is in your insurance

network? Those dentists are in the business of fixing teeth, yes, but they’re doing it in the most economical way possible. Furthermore, most cosmetic dental procedures are not covered by dental insurance anyway. There are some exceptions, but patients generally pay out of their own pockets for pure cosmetic dental procedures. So why bother searching for a dentist who participates in your network if the procedure won’t be covered by your insurance anyway?

MISTAKE #6

Choosing a Cosmetic Dentist Voted “The Best”

Being voted “the best” by your peers in a profession can be viewed as credible but being voted “the best” by the public at large can be suspect. Why? The public’s vote of the “Best Cosmetic Dentist” in newspapers or magazines will often not identify “the best,” but merely recognize the dentist who best knows how to game the system.

For example, local and regional newspapers and magazines commonly hold an annual contest that

allows the public to vote for “the best” in a number of businesses, including retail, healthcare and the service industry. The actual public participation in these contests is quite low so the vote can be skewed by a motivated dentist who recruits his staff, relatives, friends and neighbors to stuff the ballot box.

Some magazines also publish their annual list of “the best” businesses. Often, a dentist listed as “the best cosmetic dentist” is actually a heavy advertiser in the magazine and is not an unbiased choice made by the public. In most cases, you can view this as paid advertising and of no useful benefit.

MISTAKE #7

Not Doing Complete Due Diligence

When choosing the person who is going to reconstruct your smile – one of your most important assets – it’s important to take your time. Most cosmetic procedures are not emergencies. You should take time to educate yourself on the different procedures available, the different techniques and materials used and the qualifications and skill level of the cosmetic

dentists you’re considering. If you’re unsure, consult with more than one accredited cosmetic dentist.

Your cosmetic dentist should provide you with a detailed treatment plan. When talking to a cosmetic dentist you’re considering, be sure to monitor the response he or she gives you to the kind of improvements you want for your smile. Ask questions and make sure those questions are fully answered by your dentist. Be sure that both you and the dentist are on the same page when it comes to what you want for your smile. Your cosmetic dentist should involve you in planning and designing your new smile.

If what you’re looking for is a brighter, whiter smile, there should be a few options laid out for you and those options should be thoroughly explained. It’s vital to gather all the facts before you make any decision. Ask a lot of informed questions and expect informed answers in return. In some cases, the investment required to create a perfect smile will be a significant amount of money. The dentist is the expert but that does not mean you should accept the first (and possibly only) recommendation they provide for you.

Experienced, qualified cosmetic dentists will listen to what their patients want and then present those

patients with different options to achieve a beautiful new smile.

Don't be led astray by decision fatigue. Often, having more choices does not equate to making a better decision. Decision fatigue refers to the notion that people often start making poor choices when faced with too many options. The more choices you have, the harder your brain has to work to make those decisions. This can eventually lead to decision paralysis where no decision is made at all. The brain often makes a shortcut and becomes reckless; chooses impulsively and chooses the "recommended" option. Don't make this mistake when deciding on your cosmetic dentist. Some people believe that getting several opinions from several dentists is the best way to find the right cosmetic dentist. While it's good to get a second opinion and do diligent research, too much research can lead to decision fatigue, which can lead to frustration and confusion.

Conclusion

Don't rush this decision. The right cosmetic dentist can make a world of difference to your smile and your self-confidence. Many people do not understand the

things they should be looking for when choosing a cosmetic dentist and they may find themselves bitterly disappointed with their results. Patients may then have to pay to have the procedures done all over again with yet another cosmetic dentist. Cosmetic dental procedures are not cheap so finding a skilled, accredited cosmetic dentist is worth the time and effort. You don't want to end up with irritated gums, a crooked smile, fake-looking or chipped teeth. Knowledge is power and by reading this book, you can rest assured you have the information you need to select an expert cosmetic dentist who can transform your smile into something you'll be proud to share.

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