

Mouth Matters

Dorion on Dentistry

Never Say Forever!



The recent explosion in popularity of TV shows like Extreme Makeover has had a tremendous impact on people's awareness of some of the amazing dentistry available with today's technology. However, a false misconception that may result is that these dental makeovers last forever. To put it bluntly, when a silk purse is made from a sow's ear, the things that caused the condition to look like a sow's ear in the first place are often still factors.

In our practice we tell our patients that if you broke what God made you will almost certainly break what we make eventually. An unfortunate reality is that the very best dentistry provided by the very best clinicians will eventually break down or wear out. When you consider that dental restorations are subjected to wear and tear 24 hours a day, year after year, with forces that can exceed 900 pounds per square inch, extremes of hot and cold and in some cases outright neglect, it's amazing that our work lasts as long as it does.

So the word permanent should actually never be used in relation to dental treatment whether it's surgical gum treatment, crowns, fillings or orthodontics (braces). We would be more accurate in letting people know the average life span of specific restorative materials or procedures rather than to call anything permanent. On average white fillings last around 5 years, crowns about 10 years, dentures often need replacement every 5 years, and implants are expected to last up to 15 or 20 years. Of course these are averages and there can be significant variations from person to person and even from one tooth to another.

But, before you despair, let's put it all in perspective. Consider the

following: the cost for a porcelain crown is roughly the same as the four new tires Dr. Dorion just put on his truck. While the crown should last for 10 years or more, he will have replaced his tires at least 3 more times in that same period (he's a better dentist than a driver). It quickly becomes clear that the crown is pretty darn good value for the money especially considering that it's being used continuously, every single day.

Here's the bottom line — the best most long lasting materials are the ones you were born with. That is why, as a profession, we have placed such a huge emphasis on education and prevention of dental disease. We can do wonderful cosmetic makeovers but we eventually have to replace or repair at least some of that work.

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Remember also that while durable, longer lasting materials and techniques are initially more expensive than their alternatives, they usually provide a better value in the long term since they require less frequent maintenance and replacement. In addition, the constant replacement of dental restorations subjects the teeth to ongoing invasive stresses that can lead to the untimely demise of those teeth.

So, when given a choice of dental materials or procedures, take into consideration how long it's expected to last. Only your dentist can help you make the best informed choice for your individual needs.

Yours for better dental health,

Rae Dorion, DDS

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