WITH TODAY’S ANTIAGING PROCEDURES, YOU NEEDN’T FEAR APPEARING “LONG IN THE TOOTH” BY AUDREY REGAN SOLARINO

With today’s antiaging procedures, you needn’t fear appearing “long in the tooth.” By Audrey Regan Solarino

Smile and you’re instantly perceived as more attractive, more positive, younger. That’s according to a recent study from Germany’s Max Planck Institute for Human Development. But another recent study, this one out of the U.K., showed that people overestimated a person’s age by 13 years on average if his or her smile showed the effects of aging due to things like yellowed or stained teeth.

So while we’re fighting those wrinkles, gray hairs and love handles, let’s add our smiles to the list of areas that need upkeep. Smiles are affected by a host of negative changes as we age: Our teeth darken and—despite the well-known phrase “long in the tooth” that is used to mean “old”—get shorter too. They shift and start to look crooked. Gums start to recede. And gravity is such a downer that it takes our faces with it too.

“As we age, our teeth wear down, our lips are less supported, and our chin gets closer to our nose,” says Sam Muslin, D.D.S., a Santa Monica, Calif., dentist.

Sigh.

It’s a lot to chew on, but help has come in the form of antiaging dentistry. The industry is fighting the effects of aging in many ways, from whitening, bonding and veneering to bite correction, jaw repositioning and lip enhancement. There is even a trend toward noninvasive “smile makeovers” instead of plastic surgery—dental face-lifts that build up your teeth and, in the process, lift and lengthen your face.

“Research and development in dentistry have exploded in recent years,” says
Paula S. Gould, D.D.S., a cosmetic dentistry specialist in Englewood. “We have made tremendous strides. Even things we thought were impossible to change, like your gum line, can now be altered.”

We brushed up on the latest in anti-aging dentistry with some of our area’s leading experts. Below, they explain the latest procedures to give you a healthy, youthful smile:

**WHITER TEETH = A YOUNGER SMILE**

As our teeth age, they lose their enamel coating and change color—and it’s not for the whiter. Add one or five cups of coffee a day, some berries, red wine, and pretty soon we’re looking a little gray in the tooth.

“Whitening products are fantastic today, and they give you the biggest bang for your buck cosmetically, if you’re an older person,” says Dr. Gould, who explains that whitening targets the dentin, which is under the enamel. “Your teeth will never go back to being as dark as they were.”

Over-the-counter strips are affordable but whiten by only a few shades. Take-home whitening systems that your dentist can custom-make for you will lighten your teeth considerably. “Patients wear trays for about 10 minutes, twice a day for two to three weeks,” says James D. Walter, D.M.D., F.A.G.D., of Montville. The cost for dentist-supervised take home trays? Around $300 to $400.

But for fast, dramatic results, an in-office whitening treatment such as Zoom or BriteSmile can lighten your teeth by eight or nine shades in as little as an hour. Such treatments used to cause tooth and gum sensitivity, but thanks to thicker peroxide gels and desensitizing agents, those problems have lessened. Expect to pay around $600.

**COMBAT VISIBLE WEAR AND TEAR ON TEETH**

Over time our teeth shorten from normal wear and tear. Grinding also does a number on them. Shorter teeth no longer support your lips as they used to, causing them to sag inward. Teeth also can acquire chips and nicks as you age. You have two main options to elongate your teeth and smooth out their look: bonding or veneers.

With **BONDING**, a resin material is adhered to the tooth via a high-intensity curing light. Bonding can improve a tooth’s color and shape and even close spaces between teeth. “Today’s resins are very strong,” says Richard D. Silverstein, D.M.D., of Academy Dental Associates in Englewood. “And we can match them to the patient’s tooth color perfectly.” The cost of bonding, per tooth, is highly individual, but lower than that of veneers.

**VENEERS** are thin shells of material that cover your teeth to create a smooth, straight, bright smile. Each veneer is custom-made and bonded to a tooth. They run $600 to $800 per tooth and last 10 or more years. Usually the front six or eight teeth are all you need to do. “With veneers, there are myriad materials to choose from,” says Dr. Gould. “The porcelain they make today is beautiful. It’s multilayered, so it mimics the light characteristics of natural teeth.” Because your teeth need to be filed and prepped before veneers can be applied, you can’t go back to your natural teeth. Once veneered, always veneered.

**GUM SCULPTING** is the removal of excess gum tissue to even out the gum line and make small teeth look bigger. Lasers now do the work of scalpels,
CROOKED TEETH, BEGONE!
Even if you’ve always had straight teeth, that damn aging process can cause them to shift. Missing teeth, changing facial muscles and what dentists call the “mesial drift”—the natural tendency of the teeth to move toward the front of the mouth over time—all can send even the straightest set awry. To fight crooked teeth in adults, the dentists recommend Invisalign, a straightening system of clear aligners, called trays, that fit over the teeth and move them very gradually. Patients wear each set of these wire-free trays for two weeks at a time, and they need 10 to 30 trays to get their teeth where they want them. “An added benefit is that you can take them out to eat and brush, allowing you to maintain good oral hygiene,” says Dr. Walter. The cost can run from $3,000 to $8,000 depending on the extent of straightening needed.

THE DENTAL FACE-LIFT
All of the procedures will help you attain a more youthful smile. Anything you do to build up your teeth—whether it’s bonding, veneers or one of the most liberating innovations in recent years, implants—is going to provide more structure and support to your skin, making you look younger. With implants, a specialist such as a periodontist places titanium posts into the jawbone to act as artificial tooth roots. A dentist then performs the “restoration,” which can range from a single crown that fits into the implant to replace one tooth to a bridge that supports a few teeth to full dentures that snap into place. Cost depends on many factors, and can run from $3,000 for one implant to tens of thousands for a full mouth. They are a key component to major anti-aging dental procedures.

Dr. Muslin (seen recently on TV’s The Doctors) performs a noninvasive, anti-aging dental procedure he’s trademarked as Face Lift Dentistry. He analyzes the size and position of the jaw and can move the jaw back if it’s protruding or forward if it is receding by restructuring the teeth, often all 28 of them. “I build a bite that creates a new chin position, removing years of aging from the patient’s face,” he says. A fuller set of teeth builds up the face from the inside out, elongating it and plumping it up, which makes you look younger. Cost varies from $20,000 to $80,000 depending on the amount of needed dental work.

KISS THOSE THIN LIPS GOODBYE
Collagen loss is the culprit for our thinning lips as we get older. But injections aren’t the only answer. Oleh Slupchynskj, M.D., a facial surgeon in Chatham, performs a surgical technique that plumps the top and bottom lips from the inside out. The technique is permanent, takes less than an hour and is performed under local anesthesia.

Dr. Slupchynskj makes a small cut on the inside of the mouth where the pink part of the lip (known as the vermilion) continues to the interior. He pushes this hidden part of the lip forward, adding it to the vermilion visible on the face. The procedure restores the lips a person was born with without the use of fillers, which aren’t a permanent or natural remedy.

Says Dr. Slupchynskj, “Fillers add excessive volume to atrophic lips rather than recreating the true symmetry and proportions of the lip.”

WHAT YOU CAN DO DAILY
Keeping your teeth attractive and younger-looking begins with regular preventive oral hygiene:

» BRUSH MORNING AND NIGHT, but not more than three times a day. “Be meticulous with your daily care,” says James D. Walter, D.M.D., F.A.G.D., of Montville. “That way you can minimize premature gum recession. Receding gums as we age are not a foregone conclusion.”

“But brushing too often can cause gum irritation,” says Dr. Walter, who adds that soft-bristle brushes are less likely to trigger this problem than medium or hard bristles—while doing just as good a job. He also recommends electronic toothbrushes for patients with conditions such as arthritis or eczema that make brushing difficult.

» FLOSS DAILY, PREFERABLY AT NIGHT “so that you’re not sleeping with all those bacteria on your teeth,” says Richard D. Silverstein, D.M.D., of Academy Dental Associates in Englewood. He explains that flossing is important because it gets where your toothbrush can’t, and where most cavities develop: between your teeth.

» AND RINSE. Englewood dentist Paula Gould, D.D.S., says to choose an anti-microbial brand mouthwash that tastes good. “It needn’t burn,” she says. “Mouthwashes help fight bad breath, but more important, they eliminate harmful bacteria left even after brushing and flossing.”

» SEE YOUR DENTIST AT LEAST TWICE A YEAR FOR CLEANINGS. Dr. Silverstein recommends visits every three months for his patients over 35. At that age, he says, we start to need more frequent visits “to disrupt the colonization of bacteria on the gums and prevent periodontal disease. Once it becomes tartar, only we can remove it.”

» EAT AND DRINK RIGHT. What is the biggest cavity culprit? Here Mom has always known best: It’s sugar, so limit sugary sodas and sports drinks. Also minimize anything acidic. And that apple a day doesn’t just keep the doctor away. Dr. Gould says apples are one of the healthiest foods for cleaning the surface of your teeth.