

The dazzling reality TV smile – but at what cost?

Reality TV stars are setting the trend for Hollywood smiles, but how good are quick-fix teeth veneers for you in the long-term? Dentist Martina Syron believes the shine may soon rub off...

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Bright, white teeth are the go-to look right now. In fact, research by teeth whitening experts White Glo found that more than 100,000 people a year have whitened their teeth in the UK, and a quarter of us have had some kind of cosmetic dentistry.



With the industry estimated to be worth £2 billion, that figure is set to rise with the influence of social media.

And for some, bleaching teeth isn't enough. Thanks to the rush for porcelain veneers by reality TV stars, we're led to believe they're the quick-fix route to the perfect smile.

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Veneers fit over your own teeth like false fingernails, concealing any imperfections underneath to give you those gleaming, pearly whites.

'People get veneers if they don't like the colour of their teeth and they want them whiter than they can go with bleaching,' explains Martina Syron, principal dentist and owner of Millbank Dental Care in Westminster, London.

'Bleaching removes stains and takes you back to the lightest natural colour of your teeth, or even a bit lighter.'

When you think of dazzling white smiles (cough! Veneers), the same offenders spring to mind – Katie Price, Stacey Solomon, Joey Essex and not forgetting Rylan Clark-Neal – whose glaring gnashers even have their own Twitter account!

'TV reality stars are different to the average person,' Martina continues. 'These people are willing to have their enamel cut, so that their teeth stand out and are bright white. So, now, if someone goes on a reality TV show with their natural teeth, they look like the odd one out, because so many of the others will have veneers.'

But while they might look flash, the mechanics behind veneers isn't so glam...

'Veneers aren't reversible,' says Martina. 'The dentist has to shave down the enamel by roughly 1/2mm. If the teeth are twisted, they have to shave even more off, and there's a risk it'll cause irritation to the pulp and the nerve. In extreme circumstances, the tooth will eventually need root canal treatment.'

And we can't talk about teeth without mentioning this year's Love Island star Jack Fincham's luminous white veneers!

Narrator Iain Stirling joked that 'the bedroom lighting will be provided by Jack's gnashers' – but what's Martina's expert opinion on his bobby dazzlers?

'The problem with some young guys is that they work out, and you can't lift a heavy weight without gritting your teeth,' says Martina. 'If you clench too hard on your porcelain veneer, there's a high risk you could crack or chip it – unless you wear a tooth guard.'

Just like Jack, who claimed he got his veneers in Turkey, with a holiday to boot, more and more people are heading abroad to reduce costs.

'It's often arranged as a package deal, so the company will organise their flight, hotel, the whole lot,' explains Martina. 'But has someone going abroad for dental work checked the dentist is named and on the dentist register of that country, is medically insured and has experience of the type of work you want? Vitally, will the same dentist be available to remedy any problems in the future?'

There are other difficulties with dental tourism, too – for example, Katie Price suffered a terrifying allergic reaction to penicillin after getting new teeth in Turkey.

'If there are problems with the veneers back in the UK, it's hard for the dentist to identify where the pain is coming from,' says Martina. 'A guy came to me with really complicated bridge work he'd had done abroad. It turned out his teeth had all rotted underneath. You hear some real horror stories.'

She adds, 'If you're getting your teeth done abroad, then keep a model of your original teeth and a copy of the preparation model, plus copies of any X-rays taken and notes of the type of cement used to stick them on. That way, other

'Veneers aren't reversible – teeth are shaved down'

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dentists will know the original shape of the tooth and how much has been cut from it.'

But that's not the only problem. 'I often see people who struggle with sensitivity to hot and cold drinks,' says Martina. 'As the veneer is near the gum line, the gum might pull away and expose the root. Or the nerve has been irritated because of the drilling.'

While veneers were once exclusive to the rich and famous, the 'Essex effect' has swept through the UK and is responsible for taking a large bite out of the wages of those on the quest for TOWIE teeth.

'Veneers cost around £600 per tooth,' Martina says. 'So it can cost from £12,000 for the full set. I had a girl come into the dental surgery feeling upset because her veneers looked fake. I asked how she'd paid for them and she replied, "Interestfree credit." It's like a mortgage she'll be paying off for the next 10 years. I find it really sad.'

But, eager to emulate their idols, many people simply aren't being informed about the fact that their veneers will need to be replaced, on average, every 10 years.

'Veneers are glued to your tooth's enamel,' Martina explains. 'If it's repeatedly replaced, the tooth will eventually run out of enamel. Then it has to be converted to a crown, which cuts the back of the tooth, meaning it's shaved down even more.'

Indeed, a One Poll survey of 1,000 16- to 30-year-olds commissioned by the London Smile Clinic found that a third now regret having cosmetic treatment and would have chosen a less drastic option if given the opportunity. Martina agrees they may not be smiling in years to come, either.

'There could be a biological price to pay in the long-term,' she explains. 'If you were to have your veneers done at a young age, along with replacements over the years, then you may end up having implants. You put so much strain on the tooth that, if the root cracks or there's a problem, you'll lose the tooth.'

She adds, 'Veneers are an invasive treatment. I advise anyone thinking of getting them to bleach their teeth to begin with, align them with orthodontics and have minor chips or unevenness bonded with tooth-coloured filling material. Together, these procedures can make teeth look perfect with no drilling or loss of enamel, so the person can see if they're happy with that result first.'