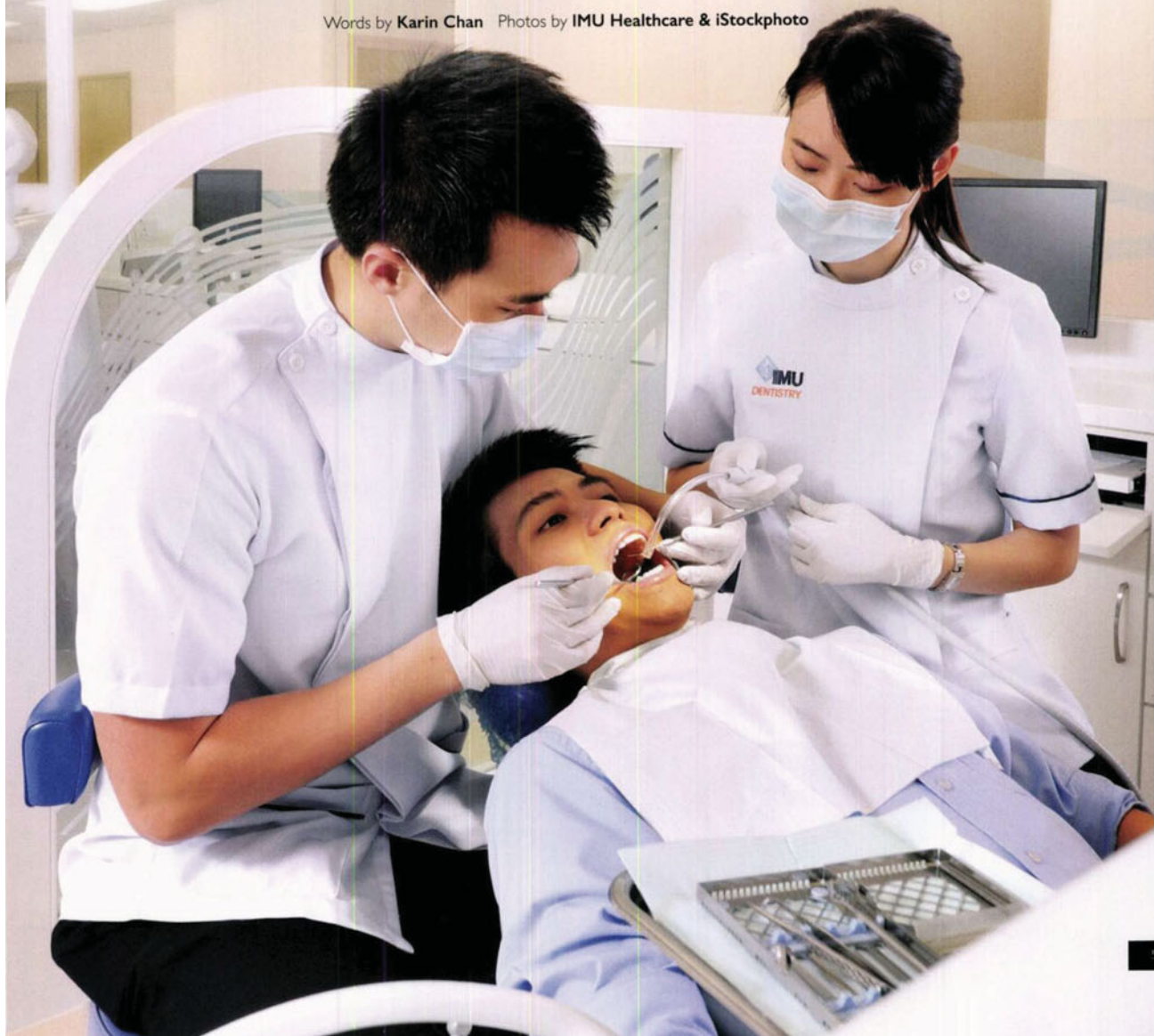


# Put On A Smile

Sometimes you need just a little bit  
of extra help to get a perfect smile

Words by Karin Chan Photos by IMU Healthcare & iStockphoto





**W**e all know the drill: brush your teeth at least twice a day, rinse with mouthwash, floss once a day and visit the dentist twice a year. That might be enough to keep your teeth in reasonably good health, but it won't guarantee you that perfect Hollywood smile. Not all of us can have that perfect smile naturally due to genetics, accidents or teeth that just don't grow the way they're supposed to.

It's important to be confident in smiling because it can light up your features and give people a more positive impression of you, which you lose out on if you're self-conscious about how your teeth look. That's where aesthetic dentistry comes in. You can get crooked teeth pulled straight, whiten yellowing teeth and even have your entire smile digitally redesigned. Now, doesn't that put a smile on your face?

### Teeth Whitening

We've all been conditioned into thinking teeth have to be white to be healthy (hence the term 'pearly whites'), but the natural colour of teeth is actually either slightly yellow or greyish. However, teeth can also be stained by tea, coffee, smoking, red wine and a buildup of tartar, which is when professional bleaching might be an option.

A whitening product is applied to your teeth with a special mouthguard-like tray at the dentist, and you will need to reapply it on your own at home from two to four weeks. Alternatively, laser whitening is where you get a laser shone on your teeth after the product is applied to speed up the reaction. Your teeth might feel sensitive after the procedure. The whitening effect will last longer if you avoid sugary food or any of the aforementioned things that stain teeth. Note that this will only work on natural teeth.

### Braces

Braces are the form of cosmetic dentistry that people are most familiar with. They use wires to pull or push teeth and are usually combined with metal or ceramic brackets bonded to the front or back of the teeth, along with thin rubber bands to exert extra pressure. Braces are used to correct conditions such as under and overbites, crooked teeth and more. The best age to wear braces depends on the problem, and treatment takes anywhere from a year and a half to three years. Some tooth extraction may be necessary if there isn't enough space.

Contrary to popular belief, adults can wear braces too and many prefer lingual braces, which go on the back of your teeth and are hidden from view. There are also clear braces like Invisalign, which are basically clear trays that fit over your teeth and gradually move them into place. This option, while less obvious, is also more expensive.

### Veneers

Veneers are thin porcelain or composite shells of tooth-coloured material that cover the teeth to hide imperfections like chips, cracks, breaks or irremovable stains, or to close small gaps that don't require a full set of braces. Think of them like stick-on nails. Some enamel will be removed from the teeth to bond the veneer permanently to the surface of the tooth, and some teeth may need grinding down to make them fit behind the veneer.

Veneers are custom made and colour-matched to look as natural as possible. They can last for a long time – ten years or more – and you can brush and floss like you would with normal teeth! However, veneers can chip or break just like regular teeth, so people who grind their teeth may not be eligible to get them. The procedure is permanent, but the veneers will eventually require replacing.

### Bridges and Dental Implants

Both these procedures are more involved as they are meant to replace missing teeth. A bridge functions as the name suggests – it joins a gap. One tooth on either side supports one or more fake teeth, which fill in the gap left by the missing teeth. The biting force is more evenly distributed and the real teeth won't suffer too much stress or wear. However, take care to clean under the fake teeth, and you won't be able to remove the bridge on your own as it is permanently cemented to the two real teeth.

A step further than a bridge is dental implants, which are essentially one or more artificial teeth that are fused to the jawbone. More involved surgery and time is needed. Over several visits, the patient will get their mouth x-rayed, the titanium root put into the bone, an extension attached to the implant and a crown put on top. This process is more expensive, but once complete, the implant will function just as well as a normal tooth would and be just as comfortable.

### Digital Smile Design

Dentists can digitally redesign your smile to suit your personality and facial profile. They will take photographs and video of how you smile and help you decide the best colour, width, length and shape of teeth. After selecting the best image, they will create a mock-up of that teeth set and place it over your existing teeth, like temporary veneers, for you to 'trial' for a week. If you're happy, an exact replica will be cemented permanently on your teeth. If not, then a new model is made and trialled. This is the future of the perfect smile. **11**

### DID YOU KNOW?

1. You should floss first before you brush (with at least 18cm of floss) as it makes brushing easier.
2. Your saliva can neutralise mineral loss from food. After eating, wait 30 minutes before rinsing your mouth with water.
3. Brush your teeth with extra soft or soft bristles. Medium and hard bristles will accelerate irreversible tooth wear.
4. Regular brushing removes 50 per cent of plaque, flossing removes 10 to 20 per cent, and mouthwash another 10 to 20 per cent.
5. You need at least 20 functional teeth in your mouth to cope with the demands of a balanced diet.

JULY

HEALTH, FITNESS & WELLNESS

**"It's important to be confident in smiling because it can light up your features and give people a more positive impression of you"**

