Veneers

What is a veneer?

A veneer is a thin layer of porcelain made to fit over the front surface of a tooth, like a false fingernail fits over a nail. Sometimes a natural colour 'composite' material is used instead of porcelain.

What are the advantages of veneers?

Veneers make teeth look natural and healthy, and because they are very thin and are held in place by a special strong bond (rather like super-glue) very little preparation of the tooth is needed.

When would I need a veneer?

Veneers can improve the colour, shape and position of teeth. A precise shade of porcelain can be chosen to give the right colour to improve a single or group of discoloured or stained teeth. A veneer can make a chipped tooth look intact again. The porcelain covers the whole of the front of the tooth with a thicker section replacing the broken part. Veneers can also be used to close small gaps, when orthodontics (braces) are not suitable. If one tooth is slightly out of position, a veneer can sometimes be fitted to bring it into line with the others.

What about alternatives?

A natural-coloured filling material can be used for minor repairs to front teeth. This is excellent where the tooth supports the filling, but may not work so well for broken tooth corners. There will always be a join between the tooth and the filling material. Crowns are used for teeth that need to be strengthened – either because they have broken, have been weakened by a very large filling, or have had root canal treatment.

How long will a veneer last?

Veneers should last for many years, but they can chip or break, just as your own teeth can. Your dentist can give you an idea of how long they can last, but it is not possible to be precise – every person's chewing and biting habits are different and the range and hardness of foods over the years can make a big difference. Small chips can often be repaired, or a new veneer fitted if necessary.

How are teeth prepared for a veneer?

Some of the shiny outer enamel surface of the tooth may be removed, to make sure that the veneer can be bonded permanently in place later. The amount of enamel removed is small and will be the same as the thickness of the veneer to be fitted, so that the tooth stays the same size. A local anaesthetic (injection) may be used. Once the tooth has been prepared, the dentist will take an 'impression' for the dental technician, and record the colour of the surrounding teeth to make sure that the veneer will look natural.

How long will it take?

A veneer takes at least two visits; the first to prepare the tooth and to match the shade, and the second to fit it. Before bonding it in place, your dentist will show you the veneer on your tooth to make sure you are happy with it. Bonding a veneer in place is done with a special adhesive, which holds it firmly on the tooth.

Will I need a temporary veneer between visits?

Because the preparation is minimal you may not need a temporary veneer, your dentist will advise you.
The tooth will look similar after preparation, but can feel slightly rough until the new veneer is fitted.