



## Banishing Laugh Lines

Think of it as dental work with benefits: Implants, veneers, and other procedures that restore the height of teeth also can soften lines around the nose and mouth.

To get an idea of how teeth support the face, think about how someone looks when his or her dentures are out. In addition to restoring your pearly whites, veneers and crowns can add more fullness to the lips. Implants can do the same by filling in gaps where teeth are missing or broken.

Even a slight change in what Fairfax cosmetic dentist Gordon Rye calls “vertical dimension”—which we all lose as teeth get worn down with age—can make the corners of the mouth turn down, jowls more prominent, and “marionette lines” deeper. Procedures that restore height to the teeth have a smoothing effect on the lower face.

Michael Pollowitz, a general and cosmetic dentist in DC, says the loss of collagen and fat in the face as we age makes teeth more important as support structures. Like many other cosmetic dentists, Pollowitz works with a plastic surgeon when a patient wants full facial rejuvenation—often the teeth are the first salvo. Orthodontist Jill Bruno and her husband, Jim Bruno, a plastic surgeon, coordinate orthodontic, surgical, and cosmetic procedures at their Center for Facial Harmony in Chevy Chase.

If you’re thinking about undergoing major dental work just to banish lines—and not because the teeth need repair—you might consider this: Though results are longer-lasting than with Botox or fillers, this approach is far more expensive than injectables.



## Braces Now or Later?

Braces used to be a teenage rite of passage. But these days you see six-, seven-, and eight-year-olds with mouths full of metal. Early braces are controversial with parents, who question whether they’re truly necessary.

According to orthodontist Jill Bruno, early braces aren’t needed for crowding or overbites, so you might seek a second opinion if your orthodontist is pushing them. They can, however, be helpful in some instances. These include a cross bite, in which the upper teeth fall inside the lower teeth when biting down. Left untreated, this can throw off the symmetry of the face.

When there’s a significant skeletal discrepancy, early braces are also a good idea. This might be a large lower jaw with a small upper jaw (“Think Jay Leno,” says Bruno) or vice versa. If you don’t correct such a condition with braces early, surgery or extensive treatment may be needed later.

Teeth growing in crooked or twisted require early braces because they’re more vulnerable to breaking.

## State of the Art

Does the mosquito-like whirl of the drill make you want to jump out of the dentist’s chair? Many dentists such as Brian Gray are using new, quieter electric handpieces instead of air-driven drills.

If a cavity is superficial, the dentist may not even have to use a drill. A new handpiece that essentially “power-washes” away decay with abrasive powder can be used instead, often without any anesthetic. It’s especially helpful for decay in baby teeth and for first-time cavities in adult teeth.

Good news for the needle-phobic are new gizmos such as the Wand. DC dentist Paul LaRose uses it to inject dental anesthetic very slowly into the gums—the pain most patients feel when receiving an injection is from the amount of fluid, not the needle itself. The Wand gauges the optimal flow rate for the amount of anesthetic being used, says LaRose. Many dentists have been doing this manually for years.



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