

Are Lumineers the Right Porcelain Veneers for You?

I was sitting at home last month on a weeknight watching late night cable and saw an ad (that I'm sure you've probably all seen once or twice) **telling me how I can get whiter, straighter teeth with Lumineers in a shorter time and at a significantly lower price than traditional porcelain veneers.**

Besides sounding like something I'd be proud to say were on my teeth (Lumineer!, has a radiant ring to it, doesn't it?), whiter, straighter and cheaper appealed to both my sense of aesthetic and my sense of frugality. **So I decided that I'd do a little word of mouth investigation and find out if the product behind the great name and appealing claims was as good as it sounded.**

What Makes a Lumineer Different

The first thing I learned was that Lumineers **aren't really any different from regular porcelain veneers**; they're made in the same way using the same material. What makes them unique is that **they're super-thin, about as thick as one of your contact lenses, and can be placed on your teeth without all the drilling and prep work associated with standard porcelain veneers (at least that's the sales pitch).**

"So, unlike regular veneers, the idea is that these veneers can save healthy tooth structure and eliminate the need for extensive tooth reduction, injections and so forth," says Dr. Debra King of the Atlanta Center for Cosmetic Dentistry. "Sounds great, right?"

"The problem is that unless you have very specific circumstances like lots of gaps, or teeth that flair in toward your tongue and need to be built outward you usually end up with bulky, fake-looking teeth. With regular porcelain veneers you may remove as little as half a millimeter from the existing tooth and replace it with porcelain so it looks natural. Typically, unprepared veneers simply look too toothy."

Manhattan dentist Dr. Ramin Tabib sees the same downside: "Aesthetically it can look very bulky and opaque...**A straight no-prep veneer like they recommend is bound for disaster at some point.**"

So it's in the preparation, then, that Lumineers might not be the perfect solution. Of course there is nothing to say that your dentist can't do the same prep work as she would with conventional veneers: no-prep is simply a part of the marketing slogan. So your dentist could still use the Lumineer product (I'm looking for cost-cutting here, remember) with just some minor prep work.

And prep work isn't done just to remove part of the teeth; it also helps in the bonding process. **"Bonding works best when you have surface preparation on the tooth,"** says American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry President and New Port Beach dentist Dr. Nicholas C. Davis. "So if the teeth are just slightly roughed, you know, break the glaze off of the tooth, but not tooth reduction, any veneer is going to stick better. **So by saying 'no-prep' you might be compromising a little bit in the adhesion process.**"

Lumineers and Patient Selection

Alright, so we can work around the prep and still use the less-expensive Lumineers, but if your not removing part of the tooth you have to worry about bulkiness, because if you're adding thickness to the front of our teeth (even-contact lens thickness) it could stick out too far and even create a lip at the top of your tooth by gum line that can cause cleaning problems.

This means you have to have the right circumstance (the product certainly isn't for everybody). "I am going to give you an example of where Lumineers would be the best," says Dr. Davis. **"If your front two teeth happen to be tipped back, where the two teeth on either side are sticking out a little bit, so all you need to do is build up those teeth, that's a perfect place for the Lumineer concept."**

"I'm not saying it should never be done, and we have done them at times, but case selection is critical for success," says Dr. King. **"There are just very few cases where you can get a nice, natural result, and again, that's generally on people who have teeth that need to be bulked out or made larger."**



Before



**After conventional porcelain veneers.
Performed by Dr. Ramin Tabib**

Aesthetic Concerns

Dr. Tabib says that even in these cases he still doesn't like Lumineers as an option. He just doesn't think they look good: "too opaque" he says. He does use a veneer lab to create his own contact-lens-thin porcelain veneer that he believes is more aesthetically appealing than the Lumineer product. In fact many dentists will use a lab that they are comfortable with instead of opting for the Lumineer version.

Even if it's not the perfect product that I envisioned after seeing my late-night ad, it can be used to give you some good results. **Dr. King has used them on a few patients and even had a glowing testimonial from a young lady, at the beginning of her modeling career, that wanted Lumineers to help give her a nicer smile.**

Dr. Tabib has met a few people with Lumineers and saw some mixed results, but not altogether bad: "One person didn't look so bad. **They were pretty bright but I think that is what the person wanted.** One person that I saw, I thought it was atrocious. They liked it, it just looked bulky. **It's so appealing to a patient to have Lumineers, from the cost point of view to the time issue.**"

Wrapping Up

Well okay, maybe it's not the perfect product, **but if you fall into the right category it still sounds appealing when compared to options that can be as much as double the price.** Just remember it's always important to find a dentist you are comfortable with, has before and after pictures that illustrates his/her work, and that you can trust to give you the smile that you want. ■