WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

CROWNS, BRIDGES & VENEERS

Crowns and bridges are usually made of porcelain and gold alloy. Porcelain is strong and can be made to match the colour of the natural teeth.
Gold alloy is used for its strength, hardness and durability. It is especially useful for molars, which must withstand the forces of grinding and crushing.

Crowns: The outside of each tooth is made of enamel, which is extremely hard. Although teeth are strong and difficult to break, trauma such as a fall or a blow to the face may chip or break them.
Tooth decay may also severely weaken a tooth, with a high risk of the tooth falling apart.
Root canal treated teeth (where the pulp of the tooth containing nerves and blood vessels is removed) are weakened and have a greater chance of breaking. Also a tooth with a large filling can be at risk of breaking.
In these cases, a crown is often the best way to save a tooth and strengthen it. A crown fits over the existing natural tooth and replaces the natural crown, the part of the tooth seen above the gums.

Bridges: Bridges replace one or more missing teeth, They consist of an artificial tooth (teeth) anchored to the natural teeth on each side of the gap with crowns.
If a tooth is lost through an accident or is too badly decayed and beyond saving, a bridge may be the treatment of your choice to fill in the gap.
Teeth have many functions apart from chewing and biting, so missing teeth should be replaced for the following reasons:

- to improve appearance
- to prevent stresses causing damage to other teeth
- to prevent the teeth near the gap from tilting over
- to maintain the natural bite
- to improve chewing ability
- to stop the opposing tooth from over erupting

Preparation for a crown or bridge: On your first visit the dentist will take impressions of your upper and lower teeth to make a record of their appearance and how they fit together in occlusion.
The area is numbed with a local anaesthetic and the tooth (teeth either side of the gap) is shaped using a drill, making the tooth (teeth) smaller by one or two millimeters all around the tooth (teeth). After shaping, another more accurate impression is taken to record changes to the prepared tooth (teeth).
The impressions are sent to a dental technician who makes the crown or bridge according to specifications set by the dentist.
To protect the prepared tooth (teeth), a temporary crown or bridge is attached to the reshaped tooth (teeth) with temporary cement. As a temporary crown or bridge is not as strong as the final crown or bridge, you should chew on the opposite side of the mouth and avoid sticky or hard foods.

At the next appointment the temporary crown or bridge is removed; no drilling is needed. The new crown or bridge is placed over the reshaped tooth to check that shape and colour match properly. If they do the crown or bridge is cemented to the tooth (teeth) with dental cement. The cement usually sets after one hour and reaches full strength in twenty-four hours.
As with any dental treatment crown and bridge work has risks. For example the tooth (teeth) during preparation may break; infection of the pulp or gums; short term pain; altered feeling by the new crown or bridge it may be a millimeter high; the crown or bridge may become loose by a strong force but the crown or bridge can be easily re-cemented.

Porcelain Veneers: These are thin tooth coloured porcelain (ceramic) shells carefully crafted to bond to and cover the front of unsightly front teeth. They are a more conservative treatment than a crown and can often be used as an alternative if the underlying tooth is strong and healthy.
Veneers are excellent for treating chipped, discoloured, slightly misaligned teeth or gaps between teeth; a tooth that is to small or has irregularities can be successfully treated with a veneer.

Preparation for a veneer: An initial impression is taken to have a record of their appearance and to show how they will change by the end of the treatment. To prepare each tooth we will numb the area and then remove a thin layer (about the thickness of a fingernail) from the surface of the tooth. This allows room for the veneer to be cemented into place later. A second more accurate impression is taken of your teeth and is sent to a dental technician, who manufactures the veneer to fit your tooth.
Cementing of the new veneer occurs at the next appointment. The dentist will check the colour and fit before finally cementing the veneer into place. Once the veneer is cemented to the tooth, it is trimmed and polished.
Caring for your veneers will ensure that they last a long time, but excessive chewing or biting, especially on foods like hard lollies, ice or bones may break the porcelain. Holding other hard objects in your teeth such as nails or bottle tops may damage the veneers.
If they are struck by sharp objects, porcelain veneers can fracture, just like normal teeth. Wearing a mouthguard during sport is strongly recommended.
Crowns, bridges and veneers must be cleaned like every other tooth for good dental hygiene. It is important to extend the lives of the crowns, bridges and veneers. You must brush and floss your teeth every day and have regular check-ups to prevent decay.

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