

Mouth Matters

Dorion on Dentistry



The Dark Tooth Part 2: The Adult Tooth

Nothing stands out more than a dark coloured single tooth in a row of otherwise white teeth. There are several reasons why a single tooth will darken. There are also a number of solutions to the problem and which one works best is often best determined by what caused the tooth to darken in the first place.

As with baby teeth, injury, decay or infection in a permanent tooth can cause the pulp tissue within to die. Frequently this results in darkening that starts from the inside out. And, even when that dead tissue has been removed with root canal treatment, the tooth tends to remain dark and often gets progressively darker with time. In the front teeth this is very unsightly and can significantly detract from your smile.

Fortunately there are several ways to renew a dark tooth to make it look white again.

Older style filling materials can cause a tooth to darken as well. For example, silver amalgam fillings, being dark to begin with, are often visible in your smile when they've been placed in upper bicuspids and sometimes can even be seen in your molars if you have a wide smile. Even if they were not noticeable when first placed, the metal corrodes with time causing gray or even black shadows to show through the enamel.

The first generation of white coloured fillings that were used back in the 1960's and 1970's were not very colour stable. In addition they were quite rough on the surface and over time darkened as they absorbed stain. We still

see lots of these old fillings in front teeth that over time have become yellow or brown with age.

Fortunately there are several ways to renew a dark tooth to make it look white again. Modern tooth coloured restorative materials are very colour stable and in most cases can be easily used to replace an old dark filling. Replacement of an old filling with composite bonding is a relatively inexpensive way to make a dark tooth look less conspicuous. Porcelain, while more costly than composite bonding, is the most esthetic material available and is the material of choice if you want a Hollywood smile.

In the past if an anterior tooth had become dark after root canal treatment the only way to improve its appearance was to place a porcelain crown or veneer. Unfortunately, matching a single tooth can be a significant challenge for the dentist and lab technician and often requires veneering several adjacent teeth to ensure uniformity of colour. This of course adds significantly to the cost.

The good news is that we now have safe and simple internal bleaching procedures available that have proven very useful in bringing root canal treated teeth back to their original luster. This can be done instead of, or in conjunction with restorative treatments to get results that will make you want to grin from ear to ear.

If you have a dark tooth that keeps you from smiling with confidence, talk to your dentist. The fix is probably easier than you think.

Yours for better dental health,

Rae Dorion, DDS

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