

# How White is Too White?



A sparkling smile can do a lot more than light up your face. It may just be the ticket to your next job.

Research has shown that individuals were perceived as being more attractive, accomplished and capable (up to 63%), and more employable (up to 58%) after teeth whitening, according to Dr. Robert W. Gerlach, Research Fellow in Worldwide Clinical Investigations at Procter & Gamble. But entering a room teeth first is more disturbing than enticing.

So how can you tell if your smile will impress people or have them reaching for their shades?

“You want your teeth to be the color of the whites of your eyes, or a little bit darker, but never lighter,” says cosmetic dentist **Dr. Lana Rozenberg**, “The darker your skin, the lighter your teeth look so if you have olive or brown skin, you want to go a shade darker; the same if you have brown eyes. People with pale skin and blue eyes can go a touch lighter.”

Cosmetic dentist **Dr. Larry Rosenthal** maintains that the current bleaching rage has altered the norm. “It is socially acceptable to have a slightly brighter shade of teeth now; they will still be perceived as natural.”

Dentists agree there is no way to bleach teeth up to a blinding white—although they can develop translucent edges and a blue cast from the process. The real dazzlers are porcelain laminates, which generally take about 35 or 40 powders, layered for the right opalescent look. “That’s what gives depth and personal characteristics found in the natural tooth,” explains Master Ceramist **Jason J. Kim**, who creates veneers for most of the city’s top cosmetic dentists.

But careful of the monochromatic look. In order to appear natural, laminates should be three different shades; the body can be brighter, but the gum line should be a bit darker and the edges more translucent. “Teeth have to reflect and absorb light; that will make them look more youthful, but still age-appropriate for most people,” says Rosenthal. And make sure they are not too opaque. “Some people want teeth that look like half and half, but they would look better if they were closer to skim milk.”

Patients, of course, come armed with their own ideas, and a dentist can’t always steer them away from glaring choices. “The lab refers to that over-bright color as toilet bowl white,” reveals Rozenberg. “I made one woman who insisted on it sign a paper promising she wouldn’t say I did them.”

“Some patients ask for white the color of their shirts,” reports **Dr. Steven Butensky**. “If it approaches the color of your shirt, it’s just too white. That should be a guideline.”

One man came into Dr. Rosenthal’s office with a picture of Catherine Zeta-Jones’ smile on his iPhone. “He was in the chair showing me the color and shape he wanted. I said ‘That’s not going to work on you!’”

But even celebrities with stylists and unlimited funding can get it wrong. “Denzel Washington’s teeth are just too bright,” says Kim.

And, insists Rosenthal, “George Clooney’s smile should be bigger and brighter.”