

# Consumers showing off great whites

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There are things people do in pursuit of beauty that Beverly Presley cannot fathom doing herself. Tummy tucks and face-lifts spring to mind, she says. But Presley, a newly single 56-year-old librarian in Worcester, Mass., acknowledges she has been thinking more about the way she looks - and that led her to the dentist's chair.

In August, Presley spent 45 minutes and \$895 to have a dentist whiten her teeth, using a bleaching agent and the light of a laser. The results, she says, were worth it.

"People say to me, 'Your face looks so much brighter,' " Presley said. "I wouldn't go for the face-lift or body sculpting sort of thing. But this is more, I would say, on par with having your hair colored."

Presley's quest for pearlier whites speaks to the surging popularity of tooth **whitening** - reflected in sales of over-the-counter products and in-office treatments by dentists, and largely fed by demand from appearance-conscious baby boomers.

Sales of over-the-counter whiteners jumped 86 percent in the past year to \$358.6 million, according to Information Resources Inc., a Chicago market research firm.

An American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry survey found that in-office tooth bleaching more than tripled between 1996 and 2000, and that it is the service most requested by patients. The trade group expects a forthcoming survey to show continued growth, noteworthy because such cosmetic treatments are not covered by insurance, and consumers must pay for them out of their own pockets.

**Whitening** is gaining popularity across the age spectrum. The biggest-selling over-the-counter product, Crest Whitestrips, has done particularly well with younger consumers, according to a survey last year by market research firm Mintel International Group Ltd.

But consumers 40 and older are the most likely to have undergone treatment by a dentist, and to use other over-the-counter products, according to Mintel.

"We have an aging baby boomer population that is now more than ever focused on looking better, and this is a product that clearly falls within that trend," said John McIndoe, an Information Resources spokesman.

Baby boomers - a demographic swath technically including all Americans born between 1946 and 1964 - are reaching a point when signs of age are beginning to show in the mirror. But even more than preceding generations, many boomers appear intent on fighting back; they have already helped propel the growth of products such as hair-replacement remedies and botox treatments for wrinkles.

Now, more boomers are trying **whitening** treatments to erase the marks left by years of gulping coffee, smoking cigarettes and sipping red wine, or just to improve the appearance of teeth they have always been less than satisfied with. The appeal, say some who have tried it, is a smile that helps in personal and business relationships, and builds confidence.

Take Joseph Horneman, who says personal presentation is key to his work. Horneman, 41, works in a New York Mercedes showroom, selling automobiles priced at \$300,000 and up.

"I'm in a high-profile position, and I need to have the best smile available," said Horneman, who tried an over-the-counter **whitening** product before turning to a dentist last summer. The in-office treatment cost more than \$500, but Horneman says erasing years of coffee stains was worth it.

"Before, they were a little dull, stained, definitely in need of something," he said. "I'm constantly looking for self-improvement, and I don't go to extreme efforts, but this is something I thought was easily attainable."

Attitudes such as Horneman's point to a substantial change for many **dental** practices. As recently as a decade ago, most patients sought preventive care or came in out of necessity, for treatment of serious problems, said Dr. Lawrence Addleson, a San Diego practitioner specializing in cosmetic dentistry.

Now, more people come in specifically to improve their appearance. Boomers account for most of the demand.

"They're trying to recapture something that they don't have a lot of control of," said Addleson, who estimates that boomers make up 70 percent of his **whitening** practice.

**Illustration/Photo:** The quest for pearlier whites has led many appearance-conscious baby boomers to try products such as Crest Whitestrips or to undergo costly treatments at the dentist.

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