

# DOCTOR of DENTISTRY

A BUSINESS AND LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE FOR DENTISTS



**Innovative  
Solutions to  
Changing Gummy  
Smiles and the  
Color of Gums**

## **Dr. Alex Farnoosh**

*The Art of Creating Healthy,  
Pleasant-Looking Gums and an  
Attractive Smile*

# Dr. Alex Farnoosh

## The Art of Creating Healthy, Pleasant-Looking Gums and an Attractive Smile

By Travis Anderson

Although Alex Farnoosh, D.M.D., M.S.D., Ph.D., has practiced in Beverly Hills for more than 25 years, he has an impressive following of satisfied patients living throughout the United States and abroad.

His success as a periodontist is related to his novel approach to treating patients. Dr. Farnoosh, who specializes in the treatment and prevention of gum disease, has developed and perfected innovative methods to restore discolored gums, transform gummy smiles and provide the latest in dental implants. "To have an attractive smile, one needs beautiful teeth, pleasant-looking gums and appealing lips that are in the appropriate location," he says. "This is what I refer to as 'the total smile.' Every case is like artwork to me."

Many dentists concentrate on the appearance of the teeth, spending too little time focusing on the appearance of the gums. Not content to follow the conventional wisdom, Dr. Farnoosh has made a career of challenging the status quo.

When greeting a prospective patient, Dr. Farnoosh checks the health and color of their gum tissue, the shape and condition of their teeth, and the position of the lip line. It's all part of his effort to recommend a comprehensive treatment plan that addresses the perfect smile. "When I meet people, many of them hold their hands over their mouth because they lack confidence about their appearance," he says. "A person can have their teeth remade with beautiful veneers or crowns, but if the gum tissue is discolored or uneven, that isn't going to produce a beautiful smile."

### Eliminating a gummy smile



### Changing the color of gums

Nearly two decades ago, Dr. Farnoosh published an article about his work in the *International Journal of Periodontics and Restorative Dentistry*. His research has appeared in more than 40 publications, including *Journal of Pathology* and *Journal of Periodontology*. "I think my educational background and research experience has helped me tremendously," he says. "It has given me a broader understanding of what it really takes to help people. You might have the most beautiful painting in the world, but if you showcase it in a lousy frame, its beauty will be obscured."







Using a microscope during microsurgery is essential, as practiced by Dr. Farnoosh.

## PERFECTING GUM BLEACHING

Nearly 20 years ago, a colleague provided one of Dr. Farnoosh's patients with beautiful veneers that improved the condition of her teeth.

The woman was pleased with the dentist's work, but was dismayed by the remaining discoloration of her gum tissue. The condition of her gums bothered Dr. Farnoosh, too. "I could not sleep that night, but I had an idea," he says. "I got out of bed around midnight and went to the office. I used to be a pipe smoker and I began to wonder if this particular method I was thinking about while in bed would work on myself. It did!" Dr. Farnoosh prefers not to reveal the particulars of his gum-bleaching techniques, which happen through both surgical and nonsurgical means, but he acknowledges, "Even today, my gums are still pink and beautiful."

Although Dr. Farnoosh has lectured extensively, he acknowledges that many dentists remain unaware that his patented gum-bleaching techniques exist. While some dentists use lasers to remove gingival pigments or discoloration, Dr. Farnoosh has studied long-term data and believes his method is "far superior." He says laser therapy "doesn't achieve the harmonious color tone that you get with my technique. In addition, we don't have long-term results of the cases treated with laser."

There are many reasons for gum discoloration. For some people, especially those of African-American lineage, genetics is the main cause for a deep pigment that makes gums appear particularly dark. For others, gum tissue may have become discolored after years of smoking. Although as many as 5% of patients whose discoloration is linked to smoking require minor retreatment, Dr. Farnoosh has experienced excellent results while treating those who have smoked.

Dr. Farnoosh's patients often are amazed at the results of his gum-bleaching technique, which can be done during one office visit. "Prior to the development of my technique, there weren't any alternatives to change the color of the gum tissue," he says.

"Some people used to remove the discolored section and replace it with a graft, but clearly that isn't the preferred option and has many problems. With my method, there is little recovery time, no major discomfort and, best of all, the discoloration doesn't return. The impact on self-esteem and confidence can be tremendous."

## TRANSFORMING A GUMMY SMILE

Dr. Farnoosh also offers an innovative service for people dealing with a gummy smile. In fact, he says he's never encountered a gummy smile that he couldn't improve. He developed a method of treatment in 1998 and has been treating numerous patients with remarkable results.

Many people who appear to have excessive gum tissue actually have a high lip line that simply allows more of their gum to show. Dr. Farnoosh, who has taught at the University of Southern California since 1981, can make a big difference for people who have a high lip line by reducing the amount of gum tissue that is visible. "If your upper lip reveals a substantial amount of gum tissue when you smile, you can benefit from this procedure," he says. "Removing the gum tissue alone, called crown-lengthening, may not achieve the optimum results. In fact, he notes, it will make teeth longer, which itself may create an aesthetic problem. Many people have a

Staff: seated, Mitra on left, Edie on right; standing, Jenny on left of Dr. Farnoosh and Lori on right



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**Before: gums were totally discolored.**



**After: Gum bleaching treatment and leveling of the gum line (small dark area in the lower right was left untreated for reference)**

straight, flat line along the top that shows too much gum tissue. By repositioning the lip line by only a few millimeters, we completely change the shape of their smile, making it more attractive. If it shows 1 or 1.5 millimeters of gum tissue with beautiful teeth, that's perfect. It is a minor change with a dramatic impact."

Sometimes, a minor reshaping of the gum tissue around a short tooth also can make a difference in one's appearance, giving the impression of longer, more attractive teeth. Compared to the more conventional treatment for gummy smile, a surgery that involves repositioning the jawbone, Dr. Farnoosh's minimally invasive techniques are popular with many people.

Los Angeles-area colleagues, orthodontists and plastic surgeons refer patients to him because of his unique skills. Bill Dorfman, D.D.S., a noted cosmetic dentist and star of ABC's hit TV series *Extreme Makeover*, was so impressed by Dr. Farnoosh's approach to dentistry that he included cases treated by Dr. Farnoosh in his best-selling book titled *Billion Dollar Smile*.

**Upper front tooth was cracked, infected and had to be removed. Two lower front teeth are also missing. Patient was having orthodontic treatment (braces) to correct her bite and also to create adequate space in lower front for placement of two implants.**



**A patient with gummy smile**



**Final crowns have been placed on the implants. Black arrows indicate dental implants (one upper front and two lower front).**



**Corrected gummy smile**



## PERFECTING DENTAL IMPLANTS

As past chairman of Scientific Programs for the American Association of Dental Research, Dr. Farnoosh has been at the forefront of major advances in not only periodontology, but also dentistry in general, especially dental implants. He offers these to people who are missing a tooth, or who have a removable partial denture, a full denture or full bridge. There are many benefits associated with dental implants. For example, they look, feel and function much like natural teeth and can be integrated into the structure of one's jawbone, preventing bone loss and gum recession. However, they aren't for everybody. "A good candidate must have enough bone in the area of the missing teeth to allow me to anchor the implants," Dr. Farnoosh says. "If a patient lacks adequate bone structure, I am often able to perform a bone graft that will support the implant."

For many years, the major concern about dental implants revolved around improving the function of the new product. However, the field has advanced so much that many new challenges are being tackled. "During the past 15 years, we began to shift our focus from improving function to mimicking nature to create natural-looking teeth," says Dr. Farnoosh. "Dentistry is an art and science. One might have the knowledge, but he also has to be able to perform. There is a fine balance. The best periodontists excel in both areas."

## THE RISKS OF NOT USING SPECIALISTS

While many periodontists depend on referrals from colleagues, Dr. Farnoosh has fostered the growth of his practice through educating the public and direct marketing. Most people who contact him do so after visiting his comprehensive website, [www.thetotalsmile.com](http://www.thetotalsmile.com), or after hearing about his unique services from satisfied patients.

One reason Dr. Farnoosh believes so strongly in the power of educating the public directly is because he's seen an increasing reluctance among dentists to refer their patients to a specialist. Instead, these dentists supplement their skills and offer new services in their own office, but no one seems to want to discuss the potential risks.



"In recent years, the practice of dentistry has changed dramatically," Dr. Farnoosh says. "Manufacturers are saying to themselves, 'If I can open the market to all of the general practitioners, as opposed to only the specialists, just imagine the profit we will make.' Particularly with the economy in the shape that it is in, general dentists are trying to do as much as they can to run a successful practice. They take mini-courses over two or three days and then begin offering dental implants. Many dentists are doing implants and procedures that even I, as a specialist, may be somewhat hesitant to do."

Fortunately, Dr. Farnoosh has the ability to connect directly with prospective patients. His website includes explanations of common dental problems and potential solutions, patient testimonials, video clips, before-and-after patient photos and more. The site reaches people around the globe, driving a steady stream of new traffic to the Beverly Hills office.

To accommodate increasing demand for his specialty services, Dr. Farnoosh introduced his fly-in program, which makes treatment more convenient and plausible for those living outside of Los Angeles. "Many people from outside of the United States are interested in the treatment I offer, especially in terms of restoring the natural color of their gums," Dr. Farnoosh says. "I ask them to e-mail me a photo of their face. I review the pictures and talk to them on the phone. In many cases, they are able to fly to Los Angeles and come to the office later that same day."

## KNOWING THE WHOLE PATIENT

In part because of his extensive research background, Dr. Farnoosh is interested in the early detection and diagnosis of periodontal disease and other oral diseases and how such disease may be related to systemic health conditions. He prides himself on the attention he gives to each individual, saying, "You have to know the patient, not the disease."

Dr. Farnoosh takes a deep interest in each patient's health. He cites recent research studies that show a link between periodontal disease and health conditions such as diabetes, heart attack and stroke; nearly 80% of U.S. adults age 35 and older have some form of periodontal disease. Left untreated, he explains, gum disease can cause bad breath, swollen and receding gums, extremely sensitive teeth and potential tooth loss.

"The mouth is the mirror, providing a reflection of what is happening inside our body," Dr. Farnoosh says. "Depending on the color of the tongue and oral tissue, for example, you can tell if a patient is anemic or suffering from other diseases. Oral health plays a huge role in our overall health, but many dentists don't see the big picture. It is important to look at a patient's medical history to identify systemic issues. In the past, a physician or dentist would make a diagnosis based on experience and knowledge and then run lab tests to confirm the



Patient lost all but two of her upper teeth



Missing teeth were replaced by dental implants (metal posts) and temporary crowns were placed.



Final crowns placed on dental implants and jaw was totally reconstructed



diagnosis. Today, in relying too heavily on lab results, we lose the inquisitive nature and curiosity that helped us detect and diagnose disease in the first place."

Even with his old-school approach to patient care, Dr. Farnoosh does make use of the latest technology. For example, his office offers state-of-the-art computer technology, including a

I am writing to thank Dr. Farnoosh and his wonderful staff for the lip lowering and gum contouring procedure I received at his office. I am currently living in Baltimore, MD, when I decided I wanted to have something done about my gummy smile. I have never been happy and always been ashamed of my smile. I wanted to be like "everyone else" who had normal smiles. I went to several dentists and orthodontists in the area to find an option. The only option I was told was to go through orthognathic surgery, which would have required over a year of braces (again for me) and major surgery through breaking my jaw to correct the problem. I was very upset at the lack of options and the thought of going through such a dramatic surgery was frightening. I went to the Internet and began my search. There, I stumbled upon Dr. Farnoosh's website and videos explaining the lip lowering surgery. I immediately called and spoke to Lorie, who was more than helpful in getting answers for me. She allowed me to send her e-mails and speak to the doctor personally about my condition. I told her I would travel to California and set up an appointment for a consultation. They completely accommodated me and worked with my schedule, especially since I had traveled from Baltimore to see Dr. Farnoosh. The lip lowering and gum contouring procedure I had done was painless because Dr. Farnoosh and his assistant did such a great job at making sure I was numb for the surgery. I did not have any complications and everything went very smoothly. The difference between before and after with my smile is like night and day and I am very thankful for Dr. Farnoosh and his wonderful staff helping me. My smile was destroying my confidence and thanks to this procedure I am much more happy and accepting of my smile. I would absolutely recommend Dr. Farnoosh and his staff for anyone looking to reduce their gummy smile and who is not willing to go through expensive and dramatic surgery to get it.

—Sarah A., Baltimore, MD





**Before gum bleaching and correction of gummy smile**



**After gum bleaching of upper jaw**



**After both gum bleaching and correction of gummy smile**

digital intra-oral X-ray that reduces radiation exposure by as much as 90% while providing the ultimate in accuracy and diagnostics.

In addition to his dentistry degree, Dr. Farnoosh has a master's degree and specialty certificate in periodontology from the University of Iowa. He also received a doctorate in pathology in 1978. "My other degrees have helped me better understand the importance of early detection of oral conditions and other systemic pathologic conditions with manifestations in the mouth," he explains. "I developed interest in research and teaching at an early age. I was looking for an academic institution that had the best program in both dentistry and medicine. Although I was accepted at Tufts University, Boston University and New York University, I chose the University of Iowa, which at that time was extremely strong in both aspects — research and clinical. Early in my research career, during a literature review, I became intrigued by the function of the cell and focused particularly on mast cells, which play an important

**Dr. Farnoosh makes great effort to educate his patients on precisely what he plans to do during the treatment plan.**



PHOTO BY RICH SCHMITT, RICH SCHMITT PHOTOGRAPHY

role in many conditions, including inflammation that we have in periodontal disease or early development of cancer."

He says he tried to tackle some of the questions that crossed his mind at the time. "What are mast cells? What did they do in terms of function in health and disease, such as periodontal disease or cancer? Where did they come from? It took me almost six years of research. I remember sitting at the electron microscope every weekend trying to answer these questions. I researched day and night, and having that background has helped me develop an inquisitive mind that allows me to look at things from a different perspective. I have taught at the University of Southern California for many years, and I always tell my students not to pay too much attention to what the salesmen who come to your offices say. Instead, I tell them, 'Try to use your analytical mind to assess and evaluate the pros and cons of a product or technique over a long period of time.'"

## WHAT'S ON THE HORIZON

"We are looking at some very exciting times in dentistry," Dr. Farnoosh says. "In the near future, based on research done here at the University of Southern California, people will have their own enamel used in place of a silver filling. We will be able to use a person's genetically developed material to replace and repair teeth. The possibilities are endless."

While biking, hiking, running and monthly readings of the works of Rumi, a 13th-century philosopher and poet, help him stay mentally and physically active, it is Dr. Farnoosh's work that keeps him focused on the future. "I intend to work for at least 10 to 15 more years," he says. "I want to learn more, examine my thoughts, and develop a more analytical mind that will help me come up with new approaches. This work keeps me young."

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