Polishing —
A Critical Step in Making Restorations Last
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It only takes a few minutes, but some dentists skip this important last step in restoration placement. Here’s why you should polish every restoration you place and what to consider before you invest in a polishing system.
You take pride in your work, and want to provide your patients with the most esthetic, durable restorations possible. You want them to walk out of your office happy with their result, ready to tell their family and friends about the great experience they had at your practice and how you helped improve their smile.

Unfortunately, if you’re not polishing your restorations after placement, this likely isn’t happening. Sure, the restoration probably looks OK, but it certainly doesn’t have the shine that polishing can achieve, or the wow factor that patients hope to see when they look in the mirror. It also will attract plaque and won’t last as long, and that means sooner or later patients will need a replacement restoration or even more extensive work. Those patients might wind up back in your chair, but they are unlikely to be happy about it, and they might even be so unhappy they find another dentist.

For the clinicians still not convinced they need to polish every restoration they place, here’s a look at the benefits of polishing, what can happen if you don’t, common reasons dentists opt not to polish and how to pick the best system for your practice. Read on for advice from Dr. Hugh Flax, Dr. Ron Kaminer, and Dr. Gary Radz.
The Importance of Polishing

Some dentists opt to skip polishing, thinking it will save them and their patients time, spending just a few extra minutes chairside to polish will help ensure your patients leave your office with a beautiful, strong restoration that will last. If you invest in a polishing system that’s easy to use and provides you with the results you’re after, you’ll find that the time you spend chairside is more than worthwhile.

“The better the polish you get on the restoration the longer it will last and the less bacteria that will adhere to it,” said Dr. Hugh Flax, who’s used the Minnow polishers. “I’m going to do my very best to optimize what I do and minimize risk. I don’t want my patients having to go through the gerbil wheel of dentistry where they get something done today and then a few years later it has to be replaced. Often times that leads to more structural tooth break down and then it becomes a crown, a root canal and then an implant. The more I can do to keep things conservative, the better off my patients are.”
The Benefits of Polishing

When you take the time to polish, you give your patient a smoother restoration that will retain less plaque. The margins will be more congruent with the tooth, which will lead to longevity.

“If you polish it will look better and feel smoother to the patient,” stated Dr. Ron Kaminer, who also uses the Minnow polishing system. “Polishing makes the restoration look nice. Anyone not polishing is not doing the best they can be doing. If dentists polish 100 percent of the time they will have longer lasting restorations.”

The restorations will also be more comfortable for the patient, and both the dentist and the patient will be much happier with the end result.

Patients can tell when something is polished well.

- Dr. Hugh Flax
While not polishing might save you and your patients time, it could lead to problems down the road. If restorations are left unpolished, not only will they not be as comfortable for the patient, they’ll be more prone to staining and plaque accumulation.

“To provide patients with the best looking, longest lasting restoration, polishing is required,” said Dr. Gary Radz, who uses Minnow polishers. “Lack of proper polishing will lead to increased potential for staining and we miss the opportunity to get the maximum esthetic result. And if a restoration is not fully polished it has the potential to wear more quickly.”

This of course means the restoration won’t look as good and it won’t last as long, leading to unhappy patients who might even decide to look elsewhere for their dental care. And if the restoration needs to be replaced, this could lead to structural tooth break down and more severe problems for the patient.
Most dentists keep very busy schedules and don’t want to add extra tasks to their procedures. They feel like they’re always running behind as it is, giving them the perfect excuse not to polish. And some even tell themselves it’s not really necessary and then send their patients on their way without completing the final step that helps ensure they leave with a beautiful, strong restoration.

The truth is, if you invest in a polishing system that’s easy to use, it should only take you a few minutes at the end of the appointment to polish—hardly enough to put you behind schedule.

“It’s just taking pride in what you’re doing,” Dr. Flax said. “And just doing the right thing for your fellow man. All it takes is one or at the most two very simply steps that may take you two or three minutes. It’s time well invested. I get the pressures of running a dental practice, but if you come up with a simple system and just take a few extra minutes at the end of the appointment, you won’t have to do things over again.”
Other Reasons a Dentist Might Choose to Skip Polishing

It requires too many steps.
This certainly doesn’t have to be the case. Invest in a system, such as the Minnow polishers from Microcopy, that make it possible to complete polishing in a simple 1 or 2 step system. Minnow comes sterilized, ready to use. Simply use the Satin polisher for all restorations and if a liquid luster shine is needed, add the Hi-Gloss polisher. No polishing paste is needed. This system will save both you and your patients time, while ensuring you get the end result you both want. Minnow is a 1-Step, at the most 2-Step system.

I can just smooth things off without polishing.
In this case, what you can’t see can hurt you. Microscopic scratches give plaque the foothold it needs to adhere to the restoration. Burs cannot finish a restoration to this level of smoothness. Some dentists just don’t want to put in the extra effort, but it’s the only way you’re going to provide patients with an esthetic restoration that stands the test of time. Plaque and stain will stick to microscopic scratches left by diamonds and carbides.
Other Reasons a Dentist Might Choose to Skip Polishing

My patients don’t want to spend extra time in the chair.
While this might be true, they’ll only need to sit in the chair for a few minutes longer—and they’ll be happy they did. You can talk to patients about why you’re polishing the restoration so they understand the benefits. They’ll know you’re doing what you can to give them the best care possible and a beautiful, long-lasting restoration. Your patients are trusting you to complete the restoration and not skip steps to save time.

I don’t charge enough/I don’t get paid more for polishing.
If you invest in an economical, easy-to-use system, polishing ensures the restoration is complete and ready for use. It will only take a few minutes of your time and will lead to a better outcome. Think of polishing as part of the overall procedure. Polishing composite is the final step to complete the restoration and ensure it will last for years.
Choosing a Polishing System: Access

Now that you’ve decided it’s time to start polishing every restoration you place, you have to find the right system for your practice. Look for a polishing system that not only enables you to offer your patients a beautiful shine, but that’s efficient and cost effective as well.

It’s also important to find a system that’s easy to use. The polishers should come in different shapes and sizes that make it possible to get into nooks and crannies without a lot of pressure. Using too much pressure can heat up the tooth and cause discomfort for the patient.

Minnows are able to get into places a lot of other instruments can’t get into. They have, for lack of a better term, anatomically correct instrumentation, which is a really big help. When I’m using the polishers near the gum line or in between teeth I can get the job done.

- Dr. Hugh Flax
Choosing a Polishing System: Simplicity

“There’s so many different layers of complexity to what we do as dentists, so anything that can make things easier for me and my staff is what I’m going to use,” Dr. Flax said. “It makes it easy to train my staff. The Minnows are very user-friendly.”

All the extra steps have been taken out of Minnow. Because they come sterile and require no polishing paste, the first step with the Satin polisher, may be the only step. It removes the scratches left by the bur and smooths the margins to complete the restoration. In the posterior, this may be all that is needed to match the adjacent tooth. If the polishing is in the anterior, add the Hi-Gloss polisher to buff the composite to extremely high gloss value.

Dr. Flax also suggests looking for single-use systems. With a single-use system, you never have to worry if the instrument you’re using is dull or simply not working, and patients don’t have to worry about cross contamination. Even though patients understand you sterilize your instruments, they’ll feel even better if they know you only use instruments once before you throw them away. Single-use polishers, such as Minnow polishers, come in pre-sterilized, ready to use packets so dentists can use them once and then toss them out.

- Dr. Ron Kaminer

Just that advantage to know you don’t have any cross contamination is huge.
Choosing a Polishing System: Economics

You want to find a system that fits with your practice’s budget and choosing single-use polishers can save you money. How? Switching to single-use cuts the costs associated with cleaning and sterilizing multi-use polishers. And there’s no need for polishing paste, which leads to even more time and cost savings.

Investing in polishers that don’t crumble while you use them is another key to successful polishing. Dr. Kaminer has experienced crumbling with other products he’s used in the past, he said, but this isn’t a problem with the Minnows. “They hold up even under pressure,” Dr. Kaminer said. “And they just give you this really high sheen without a lot of effort.”

And finally, when considering systems, be sure to find one backed by a reputable company that’s easy to work with. All products at Microcopy, including their polishers, are made with great detail and precision. They take a lot of effort to make sure their products meet their high standards, and that’s important when investing in any dental product.
The Minnow Technique

Some dentists don’t polish because they think they don’t have time. The single-use Minnow polishers take that excuse out of the equation. The simple polishing system gives restorations a high luster shine in just a few minutes, in 1 or 2 simple steps. 1-step finishing can be used on posterior restorations while 2-step polishing is ideal for anterior restorations.

Both single-use polishers don’t require polishing paste. Remember, no matter which polisher you use, avoid applying pressure for long periods.

Step 1 – Minnow Satin

This polisher can be used for everyday restorations. It’s a quick solution that leaves a smooth, satin surface and uses aluminum oxide in the Silitec™ process.

Here’s what it does:

• Removes surface striations and anatomical defects.
• Leaves a smooth, satin gloss surface.

To use, apply light pressure at a max speed of 5,000 rpm.

Step 2 – Minnow Hi-Gloss

The Hi-Gloss polisher is designed for the most demanding esthetic restorations. It quickly leaves a smooth, lustrous surface. This polisher uses diamond particles in the Silitec™ process and provides clinicians with an optional second step for an even better shine.

Here’s what it does:

• Leaves a liquid luster gloss on the restoration.
• Ideal for anterior restorations.

To use, apply feather light pressure at a max speed of 5,000 rpm. Then rinse and dry.
The End Result: A Better Restoration

As a dentist, it’s your job to provide patients with the best restorations possible, and you take that job seriously. But if you haven’t been polishing your restorations, the end result isn’t as esthetic and durable as it could be.

Incorporating polishing only takes a few extra minutes, but will do wonders for your restorations. It will help you achieve that high luster shine both you and your patients want to see, while also giving your restorations the durability and strength they need to last. If you skip polishing, not only will your restorations not look as nice, there’s a good chance patients will have to deal with plaque build-up and wear, which could lead to more significant dental problems.

Polishing doesn’t have to be a time consuming task. Invest in a system like Minnows from Microcopy and you’ll only need to spend a few extra minutes chairside. Those few extra minutes will be more than worth it, leading to a much better result and happier patients.

Andy that knows Microcopy knows all of their rotary products, whether diamond carbides or polishers, are high-quality single use pieces of material. So when you’re buying a Minnow you’re investing in Microcopy and you know you’re getting some of the best material on the market

- Dr. Hugh Flax