

Dental Factsheets

Teeth whitening

Teeth whitening is the process of removing staining and discolouration from within the enamel of teeth and improving their colour through a bleaching process to make them look "whiter". It has been used in America and Europe for over 15 years with excellent and safe results.

There are two different options available; in-surgery Power whitening and professional take-home tooth-whitening kits with custom-made trays. Both procedures are based on a bleaching process that uses a peroxide-based compound of varying strength (3%-30% peroxide). The whitening gels release hydrogen peroxide, a small oxidising molecule that can enter the enamel, remove the staining molecules and then safely leave the enamel.

At Home whitening

This is achieved by wearing custom fitted, clear trays filled with a peroxide based solution. The gel needs to be held in close contact with the teeth as it takes time to have an effect. The trays should be worn for a minimum of 2 hours per day for 8 days or until you reach the level of whitening you desire.

Recent research has shown that the best results are achieved if fresh solution is placed in the trays after each 2 hours wear. The cost of tooth whitening for your upper and lower teeth includes custom made bleaching trays and enough material for three weeks wear. "Top up" packs of bleach, in various strengths to suit your lifestyle, are available. Take-home tooth whitening kits provide more permanent results over a longer time scale, whereas Power tooth whitening offers immediate results.

How white will my teeth get?

For all bleaching procedures, the amount of whitening varies from patient to patient and can not be totally predicted. Yellow or brown teeth, extrinsic stains and darkened monochromatic teeth are easier to whiten. Grey or bluish teeth and striped teeth are more difficult to whiten. In some cases dental procedures other than bleaching may

be indicated. Don't forget that an appointment with the dental hygienist to remove superficial staining is advised prior to treatment.

Will I experience any tooth sensitivity?

Any sensitivity noticed after any of the procedures reduces rapidly following completion of your treatment. For a more speedy calming effect you can use desensitising toothpaste during and following treatment. If tooth sensitivity develops following bleaching, a mild analgesic (ibuprofen, aspirin) is usually effective in relieving discomfort. Fluoride home care preparations may also be recommended to reduce sensitivity.

Are my teeth suitable for whitening?

Just about anyone who wants their teeth whiter can do so. People with significant periodontal (gum) disease may not be suitable for the home procedures if they already experience excessive sensitivity. Unsightly fillings and crowns will not be affected by the bleach and may look darker in contrast to the lighter enamel. These may need new restorations. Heavy smokers should note that tooth whitening will relapse more quickly if smoking continues. There are no known problems during pregnancy, but patients should probably delay treatment until after delivery.

How to achieve efficient tooth whitening wearing custom fitted trays filled with a peroxide based solution

Optimal results are achieved when tooth whitening gel is held in close contact with your teeth for as long a time as possible. Where possible, treatment should be carried out over consecutive days. Load the bleaching trays with a small amount of bleaching gel and wear for at least 2 hours a day for 8 days. Only small amounts of gel are needed as the custom made trays fit accurately over your teeth. If you are able to wear the trays for more than two hours, then the bleaching gel should be replaced with fresh solution after two hours unless the teeth become sensitive. If day wear is inconvenient then overnight wear gives good results - even though the solution is only active for the first couple of hours.

Keeping your Smile

Of course, you are still going to enjoy the finer things in life and these may result in the brightness of your new smile fading, as your teeth are naturally porous. Wearing your trays for two hours every couple of months, is a sure way to keep your teeth looking their best. Top up packs of whitening gel in various strengths and activity styles are available.