



## Teeth Whitening

A smile is a universal expression. It communicates happiness, radiates warmth, and makes a positive impression on others. An attractive sparkling white smile is not just associated with dental health; it is also viewed as an important asset in terms of an individual's self-esteem, social interaction, and career success. Not everyone is lucky enough to have naturally beautiful pearly whites. However, thanks to developments in the area of cosmetic dentistry over the past few decades, less than perfect smiles can be dramatically improved. Among the most sought after and popular dental cosmetic treatments available today is teeth whitening.

Teeth whitening or bleaching simply refers to any process that will make the teeth appear whiter. The options for teeth whitening run the gamut from over the counter toothpastes, rinses, strips, or gels to professionally supervised in-office and take-home procedures. There are in fact so many products on the market addressing teeth that are stained or discolored, that the choices can be both confusing and overwhelming. This is why it is a good idea to speak with your dentist when considering teeth whitening. The dentist can explain how each product works and if it is safe as well as appropriate for your situation.

How white a tooth looks is determined by how light is reflected and scattered off the enamel, the outermost layer of the tooth. Teeth can appear dark or discolored for any number of reasons. An imperfect appearance can be the result of either surface stains or discolorations inside of the tooth. While external tooth discoloration is typically due to certain foods and tobacco, internal tooth discoloration is mainly the result of genetics, certain medications, tooth decay, restorations, and trauma. Aging also plays a big role in tooth color. This is because over time the outer layer of enamel becomes thinner allowing more influence on tooth appearance by the inner layer of yellowish dentin.



In many situations teeth whitening procedures will produce pleasing results. However, not every type of stain or discoloration responds well to teeth whitening.

Some cases may require a different approach for cosmetic improvement. A dental exam and cleaning before a whitening procedure is important to determine that your teeth and gums are healthy, to remove any superficial stains and films that have built up on your teeth, as well to determine if you can expect a good result. Teeth whitening only works on natural teeth. The fact that whiteners do not affect the color of dental fillings, crowns and bridges is an important cosmetic consideration in planning treatment. In general, individuals with yellow tones to their teeth respond best to teeth whitening. Brown and grayish tinted teeth bleach respond less well and may require significantly longer dentist supervised tooth



whitening regimens or alternative cosmetic treatments. Finally, teeth whitening may not be recommended in the presence of sensitive teeth, worn enamel and significant gum disease.

There are two major groups of teeth whitening products:

- Peroxide containing bleaching agents
- Whitening toothpastes or dentifrices.

These products and procedures can be dispensed, managed, and supervised by your dentist, or independently purchased over the counter products that you self-direct.

Although over the counter teeth whitening systems purchased in stores or online have become popular, there are health concerns and limitations with these products. Teeth whitening products can damage the teeth and soft tissue in the mouth, and without professional monitoring they can be easily be misused or abused. While some over the counter products may work when healthy teeth and gums are present, they can be ineffective or problematic when sensitive teeth, exposed roots, cavities, broken fillings, cracked teeth, or loose dental work are present. As a rule the healthiest and most effective methods of teeth whitening are the ones managed and supervised by your dentist.



An in-office teeth whitening procedure by your dentist is the best and safest way to get the maximum results immediately. In as little as one hour a professional strength in-office whitening system can give you a more pleasing smile with teeth that are several shades whiter than their original shade. Under the careful supervision of your dentist the surrounding soft tissues, gums, as well as any sensitive areas of the teeth are carefully isolated and protected from the effects of the bleaching agents.

A home whitening system from your dentist along with custom trays that have been fitted to your teeth is also an excellent option. The trays fabricated by your dentist help to keep the bleaching agents in maximum contact with the teeth and away from the other areas of your mouth. Performing a home teeth whitening is a more subtle and gradual process. Maximum results are less rapid than an in office procedure and are typically achieved over a longer period of time. In certain instances an at home whitening system may be recommended by your dentist as a follow up regimen to the in office procedure in order to perfect or maintain your results.

How long your teeth whitening lasts depends on your lifestyle. Your eating, drinking, and smoking habits can have a big impact on maintaining your result. Of course the best way to insure that your smile stays healthy and beautiful is a good daily oral healthcare regimen along with regular dental check ups and cleanings.