

Tooth Whitening or Bleaching

The single most cost effective way to improve your smile is to simply bleach or whiten your teeth. Bleaching can safely lighten the color of teeth. The most effective and safest way to bleach your teeth is through your dentist. A take home bleaching kit provided by your dentist with custom made bleaching trays is effective and gives you control over the actual whitening process. By choosing a take home product dispensed by a dentist you can control how often you bleach and for how long you continue bleaching so that you can achieve the desired brightness that you desire. It also gives you the ability to maintain the level of whiteness you achieve through periodic applications of the bleaching agent which is available as refill syringes utilizing the custom tray.

While bleaching is successful in at least 90 percent of patients it may not be an option for everyone. Bleaching is generally successful if your teeth are darkened from age, coffee, tea or smoking. Gray stains caused by fluorosis, or tetracycline use can be lightened, but results are not as dramatic although some studies have shown that long term bleaching can have successful results. If you have very sensitive teeth, periodontal (gum) disease or teeth with worn enamel, your dentist may need to prescribe fluoride to help alleviate the sensitivity. How long the bleaching results last depends on your personal habits such as diet, smoking and drinking coffee and tea. When the bleaching results start to fade you can choose to get a touch-up. Some people will bleach once a month for a couple of days to maintain their desired shade.

The active ingredient in most of the available whitening agents is carbamide peroxide which is converted to hydrogen peroxide in the mouth. Several studies have proven bleaching to be safe and effective. Some patients may experience slight gum irritation or tooth sensitivity which will resolve when the treatment ends.

A take home bleaching kit dispensed by a dentist consists of having a custom tray fabricated which allows the bleaching agent to be distributed evenly over the entire surface of the tooth. While over-the-counter bleaching systems are also available and are generally safe and effective, these systems, which come in the form of strips and gels, usually contain a lower strength of bleaching agent than products used in the dentist's office and may not bleach evenly over the entire surface of the teeth. For this reason, they must be used for a much longer time frame to achieve a desired effect.

It is not possible to predict how much lighter your teeth will become. Every case is different. Typically, there is a two-shade improvement as seen on a dentist's shade guide. The success rate depends upon the type of stain involved, the type of bleaching procedure and your compliance.

Commonly asked questions.

1. Will bleaching hurt my teeth? No, bleaching gels have no adverse effect on your teeth. Both clinical and laboratory research find that properly formulated bleaching gels are not harmful with proper use.
2. Will bleaching hurt my gums? Irritation to your gums can be caused by an overfilled tray or excessive tray wear. There is no adverse effect to your gums with proper use. If you experience any discomfort, discontinue use of the bleaching gel and contact your dentist.
3. Are there any side effects from bleaching my teeth? Most patients experience some degree of tooth sensitivity to cold during the treatment. These symptoms are temporary and tend to diminish during treatment. Most patients find their teeth are no more sensitive than they were prior to bleaching within a week after treatment is complete.
4. How long will the treatment take? Most people bleach anywhere from 2-6 weeks.
5. How long does it last? Your unique combination of habits, foods and tooth structure will influence long-term results. Nonsmokers who drink no coffee or tea usually have little change in five years. Most patients need a 2-3 sessions of touch-up every 2-3 years to maintain the post bleaching result.
6. If I have had restorative work done on my teeth, will these materials become whiter or be harmed by the procedure? No. Bleaching will only whiten your natural teeth; restorations will remain the same shade. You may elect to replace these after bleaching if esthetics is a concern. Bleaching does not weaken restorative material.

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