

# Teeth Whitening and Oral Health



Whitening teeth can be a relatively simple procedure to 'freshen up a smile'. The application of a bleaching (whitening) agent can brighten the shade of your teeth. Teeth whitening is popular.

Smoking, certain types of foods or drinks, and getting older can cause teeth to discolour over time. Sometimes genetics or the use of certain medications are the cause of colour changes in teeth.

## Where to Start?

Before you consider whitening your teeth it is important to discuss your options with an oral health professional. You can explain your expectations, and discuss the pros and cons of teeth whitening. You need to make sure that the method you select is safe and appropriate for your situation.



## Options for Teeth Whitening

The active ingredient in all professional whitening products is hydrogen peroxide. The hydrogen peroxide is the substance that will whiten your teeth.

The result you get from bleaching your teeth is influenced by the cause of the discoloration, your teeth, habits and expectations. A number of factors determine which whitening solution is best for you.

### Over-the-counter

Some whitening products such as toothpastes, mouthwashes and whitening strips are 'over-the-counter' products. These products generally contain a low percentage of hydrogen peroxide (if any). These products are not as strong as what you can get from an oral health professional, but they may give you the results you are looking for.

### At Home with Professional Guidance

Your oral health professional can supply you with custom made trays and support the application of a higher percentage whitening agent. This can have a more significant effect on the whitening of your teeth. You wear your trays for 15 minutes once, or twice a day, or wear the trays overnight.

This depends on the strength and type of the prescribed whitening agent. This type of treatment requires consistent self-applied use over a short period of time, usually two weeks. Follow the instructions and recommendations set out by your oral health professional when using your whitening trays at home to avoid discomfort or injury.

### In-chair Whitening

This whitening treatment is a procedure undertaken by an oral health professional at a dental clinic. It involves a much higher percentage of a whitening agent. The results are immediate. The in-chair whitening followed by monthly whitening at home often has the most consistent results.

## Things to Consider

It is best to discuss your desired result with an oral health professional who can guide you to the right product.

Whitening your teeth too often or using inappropriate strengths of whitening agents, will not necessarily give better results. It could result in discomfort to your teeth and gums when not used correctly.

Always follow the manufacturer's directions and the instructions given by your oral health professional.

In-chair whitening can cause tooth sensitivity, due to the longer exposure time and higher concentration of the whitening agent. This sensitivity is temporary. If you already experience tooth sensitivity, the discomfort sometimes can be more difficult to manage.

Gum irritation is a common consequence of the incorrect usage of a whitening agent. Using too much gel, not targeting the correct area with the gel, or not using appropriate protection on the gums during the whitening process, can result in burns on the surrounding gums. The tissue can temporarily turn white and become painful.

Dental crowns and fillings will not be whitened. This can cause discoloured fillings to become more visible.

It is very important to maintain good oral hygiene and to keep your teeth and gums healthy by efficient toothbrushing and cleaning between your teeth daily.

### Over-the-Counter

- ▶ low or no hydrogen peroxide
- ▶ low strength
- ▶ results may vary



### Professional Take Home

- ▶ professional grade products
- ▶ self-applied with guidance from a professional
- ▶ good results



### In-chair Whitening

- ▶ professional grade products
- ▶ performed by a dental professional
- ▶ instant results



## References

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