

Bleaching

Cosmetic dental procedures are becoming more popular as people realize that brightening their smile helps create an image of youthful beauty. Many procedures and options are used by dentists to enhance a smile, but the quickest method is through dental whitening, or bleaching. Some of the most frequently asked questions regarding dental bleaching, from safety to desired results, follow.

What bleaching methods are available?

In general, there are two options – over-the-counter products or professionally supervised treatment. Over-the-counter options include either whitening toothpastes or low-strength, peroxide-based gels and strips. Whitening toothpastes are often more abrasive than regular toothpastes and rely on surface stain removal to keep the teeth bright. These toothpastes are most beneficial in maintaining previously whitened teeth. Strips and gels will slowly bleach discolorations out of the teeth, but due to their relatively weak formulation, they must be used for a much greater length of time and quite often do not reach the desired result.

Professionally prescribed products include in-office treatment and at-home tray systems. All in-office systems use a high concentration of hydrogen peroxide. The lips, gums, and cheeks are isolated so that only the teeth are exposed to the material. Recent research suggests that a light (laser) does not seem to influence the bleaching effectiveness. The total bleaching time is between 45 and 60 minutes. Most in-office systems recommend additional at-home bleaching products as a follow-up to achieve superior results.

At-home tray systems typically use a carbamide peroxide gel to bleach teeth. The concentration is less than in-office solutions, but far greater than over-the-counter products. Your dentist will make molds of your teeth, and then fabricate custom-fitted trays that hold the bleach next to the teeth. This is an effective method of whitening and will usually take several weeks to achieve the desired results.

Is teeth whitening safe?

Yes. Some bleaching products dispensed through dentists' offices as well as professionally applied (in-office) bleaching products have received the ADA Seal of Acceptance, which indicates that the product has met ADA guidelines for safety and effectiveness. These products have shown no long-term adverse effect on the body or the teeth; therefore bleaching will not make the enamel weaker. Some individuals report tooth sensitivity or gum irritation. These are both transient effects and will cease upon the discontinuation of bleaching.

How much lighter will my teeth become?

The amount of color change will vary from individual to individual depending on the condition of the teeth, nature of the stain, the type of bleaching system used, and for how long. A full course of professionally supervised bleaching will typically lighten the teeth approximately 10 shades.

How long do the results last?

Whitening is not permanent. People who expose their teeth to foods and beverages that cause staining might see the whiteness start to fade in as little as one month. Those who avoid coffee, tea, tobacco, red wine, and other stain-producing substances may be able to wait one year or longer before another whitening treatment or touch-up is needed.

The advantage of having custom at-home trays is that touch up procedures can be done periodically to keep the teeth their whitest.

Am I a candidate for bleaching?

Most people can bleach safely and achieve desirable, long-lasting results. Bleaching is not recommended for children under 16, pregnant or lactating women, or anyone with a known allergy to peroxide. A careful exam from your dentist to diagnose and treat gum disease and dental decay should precede any bleaching. Special consideration must be given to individuals with tooth-colored bonded fillings or porcelain materials used in dental restorations because they will not whiten. Therefore, using a whitening agent on

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teeth that contain these restorations will result in uneven whitening. Individuals with numerous restorations may be better off considering bonding, veneers or crowns rather than a tooth-whitening system. Lastly, yellowish colored teeth respond well to bleaching while brownish-colored teeth respond less well and grayish-hue or purple-stained teeth may not respond to bleaching at all. Blue-gray staining caused by tetracycline is the most difficult to lighten and may require another option, such as veneers or crowns to successfully whiten your smile.

What is the cost for professional treatment?

Professionally prescribed treatment will range from approximately \$600 to \$1000 for either the in-office power bleaching or at-home bleaching trays. U