

Preventive Care

Want Whiter Teeth? A Dental Visit Should Be Your First Step!

Whitening your teeth is one of the easiest things that can be done to brighten up your smile and improve your appearance. Studies have shown that increasing numbers of people are keeping their natural teeth, thanks to improved hygiene and increased preventive care. But as teeth age, they naturally darken a bit. And years of exposure to coffee, tea, red wine, colas and smoking can stain teeth and make them appear dull.

There are several options available if you're interested in whitening your teeth. Currently, one of the most popular procedures is an at-home bleaching technique. This procedure requires a dental visit, where you'll be fitted for a customized bleaching tray. You'll also receive the whitening gel that's best for you, as well as thorough instructions for getting the best results from your at-home whitening system. Usually, you'll apply the gel to your customized tray, and wear it for two to three hours a day for a week or two; tobacco stains may take longer to bleach out.

If it's faster results you're after, in-office power bleaching is also available. In this procedure, a bleaching solution that's activated by heat and light is applied in the dental office. Oxygen in the solution penetrates the hard outer enamel of the tooth and removes the underlying stains or discoloration. Since enamel is transparent, the natural, newly-whitened inner tooth will show through.

Power bleaching offers effective and quick results; typically, teeth are whitened significantly in just one visit. For stubborn stains, it may be necessary to repeat the process, or to combine power bleaching with at-home whitening sessions. Results usually last for years, and can be maximized with regular dental cleanings and periodic professional touch-ups.

Veneers, crowns (caps) and white fillings will not whiten using any bleaching procedure. That's why an overall esthetic treatment plan should be created. This will ensure a smile that's uniformly white and bright.

Over-the-counter bleaching kits

You'll likely see a number of do-it-yourself bleaching kits on the shelves at the drug store. Professional dental organizations warn against using these kits, because the "one-size-fits-all" bleaching trays usually mean that the sensitive gum tissue is exposed to a large amount of the bleaching gel, which can result in irritation. In-home bleaching kits can also damage the tooth's enamel and inner pulp chamber. Dentist-prescribed kits, thanks to the personalized fit of the tray, maximize the gel's whitening effect and at the same time minimize its contact with the delicate soft tissue in the mouth.

"The price may be right, but the results aren't; over-the-counter whitening kits aren't safe," according to experts at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn.

Whitening toothpastes also aren't generally safe, as they use chemicals and abrasive substances to remove stains on teeth. When combined with overly-zealous brushing, some bleaching toothpastes can literally rub the enamel right off your teeth!

"Many patients may be under the impression that they can use over-the-counter whitening products without concern," said Kenneth Burrell, director of the ADA Council on Scientific Affairs. "There are some data to suggest that bleaching products may cause damage to the tooth pulp, enamel, gums, and other areas of your mouth."

Whitening isn't for everybody. If it's determined that you're a good candidate for whitening, the best option for your situation will be prescribed, and the progress will be closely monitored to determine if any adverse reactions do occur.

Will Tooth Whitening Work For You?

Even with today's advanced whitening techniques, everyone's teeth will not whiten with the same results. Yellow-, brown- or orange-toned stains will generally bleach out quite well, whereas grayed teeth, or teeth stained by tetracycline use, may not bleach satisfactorily. Your situation will be carefully evaluated, and you will be advised accordingly. If tooth bleaching isn't for you, don't give up on having whiter, brighter teeth! Porcelain veneers or dental bonding could be the perfect solution for you.

Source - The American Dental Association

The Mayo Clinic

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