

Tooth Whitening Information

Background

Whitening is a procedure which is designed to lighten the colour of your teeth. When done properly, whitening will not harm your teeth or gums. Significant lightening can be achieved in the vast majority of cases. Whitening, like any other treatment has some inherent risks and limitations. These are rarely enough to discourage you from having your teeth whitened, but should be considered in making a decision to have the treatment.

There are variables, such as the type of discolouration that affects the teeth, the degree to which you follow the instructions and the overall condition of your teeth that can affect the outcome. Just about anyone is suitable for whitening. People with dark yellow or yellow / brown teeth tend to lighten better than people with grey teeth. Multi-coloured teeth, especially if stained due to tetracycline (an antibiotic) do not whiten very well and patients normally need to whiten their teeth continuously for up to six months.

When you whiten your teeth, any white fillings that blend in now will not do so at the end of the treatment. This is because the fillings will not whiten. When whitening your teeth, if you have white fillings on your front teeth (or where they will be visible when you smile) you will have to be prepared to have the fillings replaced to match your new whiter smile at the end of the treatment.

Home Whitening

This is the most cost effective method of whitening your teeth and produces the best result. The treatment takes 3 weeks. This is done at home and involves wearing a custom made whitening tray (looks like a thin transparent gum shield) with the whitening solution in it, normally at bed time.

You are responsible for wearing the whitening tray and it needs to be worn for around 6 hours a day for 3 weeks. This is why it is better to wear it in bed; most patients have absolutely no problem going to sleep with their whitening trays in. If using 6% whitening gel you need only wear the whitening trays for 30 minutes, however check with your dentist which gel you have before commencing treatment.

Potential problems

[Tooth sensitivity:

During the first 24 hours many patients experience sensitivity. This is normally mild if your teeth are not normally sensitive. It is usually easily controlled by using sensitive toothpaste during the whitening process. Occasionally it may be necessary to stop using the whitening tray for a night to let the sensitivity reduce. If your teeth are usually sensitive, then whitening your teeth may

Make them even more so. Under these circumstances you may choose to delay your whitening until we are able to get your sensitivity under control.

Once you finish your whitening treatment your sensitivity will return to whatever it was before the treatment started.

[Gum Irritation:

Temporary inflammation of the gums may be caused by whitening. Irritation can result from putting too much whitening gel in the tray. (Your dentist will demonstrate how much gel to put in the tray.) It may be necessary to stop using the tray for a short time to resolve any gum irritation.

[Avoidance of certain food and drink.

While whitening your teeth they become more porous and can pick up the stains from some foods and drinks. You must be prepared to avoid red wine, blueberries, beetroot, tomato soup and curry and other foods with strong colouration. As soon as you have finished your whitening you can return to your normal diet.

[Root Resorption

This is a condition where the root of the tooth starts to dissolve. This is rare and we do not fully understand why this happens but studies have shown that it happens more often in teeth that have had a root filling and are then whitened.

[Effect on Fillings

You must have a thorough check up before you start your whitening to check that all the fillings are strong and that you have not got any cavities (holes) that the whitening gel can penetrate. As mentioned before white fillings that match at the start of treatment will not match at the end and will need to be replaced if they are very visible.

Completion of Treatment

There is no predictable way to predict how white your teeth will go. With home whitening 3 weeks of using the whitening trays at bed time will give you significantly whiter teeth.

Following the completion of whitening there will be a very gradual relapse. Studies have shown that on average it will take 15 years for the teeth to return to their original colour. You can wear your whitening trays for a couple of days every 6 months or so to prevent relapse happening at all.