

Seven Things You Must Know Before Getting Your Teeth Whitened

Introduction

Are you happy with the color of your teeth?

Most people aren't. Thanks largely to sugar and drinks such as soda and coffee, our teeth brown faster than ever before in the history of mankind.

Plus, tack on the fact that we're living longer than ever. So you're actually walking around with those nasty yellow teeth for a few decades longer than your ancestors ever did.

Ouch.

Fortunately, modern science and technology have made it easy to whiten teeth to their original sparkle. Even though there is debate regarding the long-term effectiveness and health concerns, millions of Americans whiten their teeth every year. This is especially true for people in weddings, going for job interviews, and other special occasions such as graduating college.

Due to the increasing number of concerns and questions about tooth whitening, this report was drafted for you. Inside, we'll cover a few of the most common questions about tooth whitening, as well as a few topics you may not have considered.

First, we'll discuss the difference between tooth bleaching and tooth whitening.

What's the Difference between Teeth Whitening and Teeth Bleaching?

When it comes to making your teeth whiter, you've probably heard 2 different terms- whitening and bleaching.

Even though some marketers will spin these terms one way or the other- the truth is that there isn't much of a difference between the words.

Bleaching refers to products or methods that are strong enough to make your teeth whiter than their natural shade of white. Even though our teeth can naturally be extremely white and beautiful, some people opt for these methods due to the larger difference. Products based largely around peroxide or carbamide peroxide are typically called bleaching agents.

Typically, bleaching products can make your teeth 11-16 shades whiter (according to the manufacturers). These are huge results and are instantly noticeable if the product is effective.

Many people will also refer to the term bleaching when they're talking about the work of a professional.

Whitening typically refers to products or methods that are less powerful. Capable of restoring your tooth's natural shade, they are not strong enough to remove deep stains such as coffee or tea stains.

A few products known as whitening agents are toothpastes and mouthwashes. That said, many products will still call themselves "tooth whitening kits", just because some people are afraid of the term "bleaching" when it comes to their teeth.

Why the Confusion?

Marketers do everything they can to sell a product. They'll test multiple phrases, product names, taglines, etc. until they find what performs the best.

As mentioned earlier, some people don't like the idea of bleaching their teeth. But whitening- now that term sounds much gentler.

Meanwhile, others like the idea of the bleach. They see it as a much faster, effective way to get whiter teeth, and that's exactly what they're looking for.

However you want to spin it, the terms whitening and bleaching are essentially interchangeable. The FDA might see them a bit differently, but for what you're looking for, don't get caught up in the terminology.

Do I Need to Have My Teeth Whitened by a Professional or Can I do it Myself?

New tooth whitening products come out each and every year. They have commercials, ads on the radio, billboards- you see the stuff everywhere.

If you'll notice, 99% of these ads are for DIY kits. You really don't see many commercials or billboards of dentists marketing their teeth whitening services, right?

Unfortunately, this imbalance in advertising has created a shift in how people get their teeth whitened. Even though going to the professionals used to be the norm, most people these days try to do it themselves.

Here are a few advantages and disadvantages of whitening your own teeth.

Advantages of DIY Kits

Cost is a major advantage of whitening your own teeth. In fact, it's definitely the main reason why people choose DIY kits over going to the dentist.

Convenience is another factor. If you use whitening strips, it only takes a few seconds of your time each day to put them in and then remove them at night.

Availability comes into play as well. Good dentists are often booked up weeks, if not months, in advance. If you do it yourself, you can start as soon as you get back from the grocery store.

Disadvantages of DIY Kits

Results tend to suffer when you use whitening strips at home. These kits are limited to how powerful they can be. Typically they're about 1/3 to 1/2 as strong as the products professionals use on your teeth.

Customization is another major factor. Even if you follow the strips' instructions word-for-word, your teeth won't get the same type of customized treatment that a professional can offer.

That's because a professional will mold the strip exactly to fit your teeth. Strips will always miss small parts of your teeth- especially on right against the gums and between your teeth.

Stain Removal is easier when a professional cleans your teeth. They're able to use stronger products than you can purchase in the store, so if you have a particularly tough stain, they can use a stronger product to get rid of it.

So what are the advantages and disadvantages of having a professional whiten your teeth? Basically, you can find this data in the last few sections. Professionals cost more, are less convenient and may not be available...

But they *are* able to get better results, customize your treatment, and remove tough stains more easily than you can on your own.

Obviously there's no "right" way to do it, but if you need results extremely fast, a professional is your best bet.

How White Will I be Able to Get My Teeth?

Have you ever laid out in the sun to get a tan?

If so, maybe you've heard or read a bit about tanning as well. Chances are you'd come across numbers like "laying out for 15 minutes a day will make you one shade darker each day."

Or maybe you've heard people discuss the shades of their eye color, or the color of their cars.

Either way- when you discuss change in the term of shades, it can get a bit difficult to understand what people are talking about. How do you know if your teeth are one shade lighter, or 10?

Luckily, there are a few tooth shade charts out there to help you identify the shade of your teeth. This is definitely something I recommend doing ASAP. It gives you a baseline to judge how effective the treatment you choose really was.

Shades of White- What's the Max?

Notice that besides giving you estimates of how many shades your teeth can change, a product can't tell you how white your teeth can get. That's because each person's teeth are different. Genetics, diet, flossing/brushing habits, and a number of other things play a role.

Each tooth whitening treatment claims different levels of effectiveness. Home bleaching methods typically can expect to see no more than 8 shades difference, which is actually pretty good.

Meanwhile, a professional treatment may lighten your teeth up to 16 shades. If you take a look at a typical shade chart, you'll notice that going down 16 shades is a dramatic change for just about anyone.

But don't feel like you need to go down that much if your teeth aren't too bad. Just because you go to a professional doesn't mean you need to get the strongest treatment they have. Instead, you can choose to aim for 8 shades lighter, with a more thorough job than a DIY kit can offer.

Now- if you *are* trying to make your teeth as white as possible, you'll definitely need to go with a bleaching agent like hydrogen peroxide. These agents, as mentioned earlier, are strong enough to make your teeth whiter than what's considered natural.

How to Stay Bright

We'll talk about this a bit more in a later section, but just so you know- even if you make your teeth unnaturally white, they probably won't stay that way.

Especially if you go back to drinking coffee or soda on a regular basis. These are 2 of the main reasons why our teeth are so stained in the first place, and your bright teeth will actually show stains *faster* when you incorporate these drinks into your diet.

Important Things to Know about the Different Types of Tooth Whitening Kits

Even though we've talked about a few different topics already, there are a few important things we haven't discussed yet.

First, let's talk about how whitening actually works.

How Teeth Whitening Works

Most tooth whiteners use a peroxide-based compound as the active ingredient. These compounds whiten the teeth by penetrating deep into the enamel and oxidizing color-producing compounds found inside the enamel. Once oxidized, the molecules reflect less light and are therefore clear. Discoloration is reduced, and voila- brighter teeth.

Now let's talk about the different options you have for DIY tooth whitening kits.

Strips are definitely the most common method. First introduced in 2000, whitening strips are very thin layers of plastic that have hydrogen peroxide on one side. You wrap the plastic around your tooth, with the hydrogen peroxide on the inside.

The advantage of strips is that they are effective if used consistently. The disadvantages are the inconvenience of having the strip on your teeth for 20+ minutes at a time and the fact that they can slide around.

Brush-on kits aren't as common as strips. They basically involve a small pen, where you twist one end to push the whitening agent out the other. The primary advantage of this method is that it's very easy to spot-clean certain stains. It's also fairly inexpensive at roughly \$13 per pen.

That said, there are 2 disadvantages. For one thing, the pen isn't in contact with your teeth for very long. This allows less time for the hydrogen peroxide to penetrate into the enamel, so results aren't as good as using strips. Also, because there is nothing between the gums and your teeth, the agent is often brushed off once you close your mouth again.

Trays come in 2 different forms, and are typically better than both strips and brush-on pens. Some trays are pre-formed, thin layers of plastic that operate very similarly to the strips. The advantage is that they hold in place much better than the flexible strips.

The other type of tray is the "boil and bite" type. These are plastic generic trays that you are able to mold to fit your teeth. This is done by first boiling it (to make it soft), and then biting down on it. Even though this works better than pre-formed trays or strips, it still isn't quite as effective as going to your professional.

What are the Risks of Having My Teeth Whitened?

Some critics make it sound like having your teeth whitened is the worst thing you could ever do for yourself.

Other people swear by it, saying that it greatly boosted their self-confidence. They'd tell you that the risks were well-worth the better pictures they were able to star in (such as weddings).

Just like anything else, there are a few risks to consider with teeth whitening. Here are a few of the most common.

Sensitivity to heat and cold. Remember that tooth whitening affects the tooth's enamel. As the primary protector of your tooth against- well, everything- anything that causes it to change can increase sensitivity.

Pain. Tooth whitening can open your dentinal tubules. In other words- some people experience a small, dull pain after teeth bleaching sessions.

Chemical burns. Most of you're the tissues in your mouth are tough- but they aren't immune to damage. If too much of a bleaching gel touches unprotected tissues, a small chemical burn can occur.

Overbleaching. Even though this isn't typical with DIY kits, it can occur. This happens when your teeth are exposed to too much peroxide in a short period of time (ex. 1 hour). The tooth actually becomes so bleached that it can appear blue, a condition known as "bleached effect" in the dental profession.

Something else to keep in mind is that some studies show tooth whitening to be extremely temporary. Even if a patient experiences great results immediately, those results can fade extremely quickly- as fast as one week in some cases.

Also, some patients' tissues can become irritated- especially the gums. If you have receding gums, consult with your dentist before using a whitening agent.

Finally, don't forget that tooth whitening can damage your tooth enamel. Even though some research indicates enamel might grow back, most experts agree that it does *not* come back. So if you remove or damage too much of your enamel, you may be causing permanent damage to your teeth.

But it's Not All Doom and Gloom

Don't get the impression that these risks mean you should stay away from tooth whitening necessarily. Millions of people know these risks but still choose to whiten their teeth.

Again, it all boils down to personal preference. If you have a major event coming up and really want to look your best, get your teeth whitened. But if you just aren't happy with your current shade, maybe you could hold off on it or just use a weaker whitening kit.

Is Tooth Whitening a Permanent Solution?

This topic has been danced around a bit in this report already, but we'll briefly discuss it in more detail.

In a one word answer- **no**. Tooth whitening- no matter which method is used- is not a permanent solution.

Over time, your teeth will begin to darken back to their previous shade. This process can take faster in some people than others due to their diet or genetics.

How Long Will it Last?

If you keep a good diet and take care of your teeth, your teeth can be whiter and brighter for up to a few years.

Meanwhile, if you smoke, don't brush your teeth, or drink lots of soda/coffee, expect your results to diminish much quicker.

That's why it's generally recommended to have a plan for your white teeth. You can choose to simply whiten them for the sake of a brighter smile, but usually it's better to have a certain timeframe or event planned out.

Don't plan on whitening your teeth for 2 months, stopping for a month, and then going to a wedding. Instead, just start a month later so that right as the wedding comes up, your teeth will be their absolute whitest.

How Can You Make it Last Longer?

The first thing is to stay away from consuming large amounts of coffee, soda and sugar. This simple dietary change will not only help your teeth, but help your entire body be healthier.

Another thing is to use toothpaste made to whiten teeth. Even though this toothpaste probably won't make your teeth any whiter than your treatment, it will at least help you maintain those pearly whites.

Finally, consider chewing gum on a regular basis. Chewing sugar-free gum helps stimulate saliva production. The more saliva in your mouth, the faster any food particles will be dissolve, preventing stain and plaque buildup.

Just keep in mind that whitening toothpastes are somewhat abrasive, meaning they strip away small amounts of enamel.

Other Common Questions about Tooth Whitening

In addition to what we've already covered, here are a few final questions and answers regarding tooth whitening.

Does Insurance Cover Tooth Whitening Procedures?

No. These procedures are seen purely as cosmetic, not beneficial to the health of your teeth. If your insurance says otherwise, make sure you see it in writing before taking their word for it.

Does Tooth Whitening Damage Dental Restorations?

Crowns, braces, and other implants in your mouth will not be damaged by tooth whitening procedures. However, there is the issue of discoloration.

Tooth whitening agents are designed to bleach your teeth- NOT crowns and fillings. So even though most of your teeth will be getting lighter and brighter, your crowns or implants will stay the same color. Even though the contrast will be minor if your teeth only change a few shades, a dramatic change will cause that discolored tooth to stand out.

Does Tooth Whitening Damage Nerves?

To date, no studies indicate proof that tooth whitening products damage the nerves. Even though the teeth can become more sensitive to heat, cold and pain, this is not due to nerve damage.

What About Laser Whitening?

Depending on the doctor you talk to, some will say that laser whitening is the best method. Others tell you to stay away from it.

Generally, it's recommended not to use laser whitening. Because it dehydrates your teeth, many patients experience pain and discomfort with this procedure.

If I Use a Home Whitening Gel, How Long Does it Last?

Depending on the manufacturer, you can generally store this type of gel in your refrigerator for up to 2 years.

What if I Don't Notice a Difference?

If you are whitening your teeth at home, consider only doing the top teeth or the bottom teeth for a few weeks. This allows you to easily compare the "before", which is the untreated part, to the "after".

How Often Can You Use Home Whitening Kits?

It depends on both the kit and your teeth.

Some kits recommend usage 2-3 times daily. But if your teeth are extremely sensitive, or are becoming more sensitive, scale back a bit.

Meanwhile, if you're only using it once a day and feel fine, try moving up to twice a day.

Conclusion

A great smile can do wonders for your self-image. You'll be more confident, enjoy special events more, and just overall be a happier person.

Depending on your specific situation, you can choose to either whiten your own teeth or hire a professional. Each has its pros and cons, so weigh them before you make your decision.

Even though whitening your teeth is perfectly safe, remember that there are a few minor risks involved. No studies indicate long-term damage to the health of your teeth, but you might experience discomfort for a period of time.

Also, remember that your dental insurance isn't likely to pay for these procedures. If you decide to work with a professional, make sure you do your homework first.

Finally, enjoy yourself! You'll be amazed how much better your smile will look once your teeth are a few shades lighter.