

Teeth Whitening



Teeth whitening is the most commonly requested cosmetic dentistry procedure. Teeth whitening falls into the cosmetic dentistry category because it is designed to enhance your appearance by reducing tooth discoloration and staining to elicit a brighter, whiter smile.

The Prevalence of Tooth Discoloration

Tooth discoloration and staining is a relatively common problem. Teeth are porous and are therefore not stain resistant. Red wine, soda, coffee, and tea, among other foods and drinks, contribute to the discoloration of teeth over time. Medications such as the antibiotic tetracycline may cause significant staining, resulting in yellow, grayish teeth. Smokers' teeth can become permanently stained if the discoloration is not treated in a timely manner.

Tooth brushing alone can't brighten teeth dulled by years of exposure to such discoloring agents. In fact, people with dull teeth sometimes over-brush in an attempt to eliminate stains, and this can harm the enamel.

Teeth Whitening Considerations

More often than not, teeth whitening works adequately. Teeth whitening procedures performed by your office may potentially whiten your teeth up to 14 shades, correcting serious discoloration issues.

Occasionally tooth discoloration is so severe that whitening alone cannot fully treat the problem. Such situations may require a combination of whitening and the placement of custom porcelain veneers on specific discolored teeth. You may opt for veneer treatment alone rather than a teeth whitening regimen. We will also advise you to avoid food and drink that could stain your teeth for about a week, as well as to refrain from smoking.

Custom Fit Tray Bleaching (In-Home)

A custom fitted tray is worn over your teeth. A small amount of the bleaching gel is placed in the tray and worn for a brief amount of time each day. This is the most common technique because it's easy to use and costs less. Impressions are taken of your mouth and a thin custom-made plastic tray is made which you take home and wear for about one to two hours per day. While some results may be seen in a couple days, it usually takes one to two weeks to see the full whitening of your teeth.

Risks

Side effects of tooth bleaching include: The two side effects that occur most often are a temporary increase in tooth sensitivity and mild irritation of the soft tissues of the mouth, particularly the gums. Tooth sensitivity often occurs during early stages of the bleaching treatment. Tissue irritation most commonly results from over filling or ill-fitting mouthpiece tray. Both of these conditions usually are temporary and disappear within 1 to 3 days of stopping or completing treatment.

Individuals with sensitive teeth and gums, receding gums and/or defective restorations should consult with their dentist prior to using a tooth whitening system. Anyone allergic to peroxide (the whitening agent) should not use a bleaching product. Also, prolonged exposure to bleaching agents may damage tooth enamel. This is especially the case with home remedy whitening products that contain fruit acids.

Bleaching is not recommended in children under the age of 16. This is because the pulp chamber, or nerve of the tooth, is enlarged until this age. Teeth whitening under this condition could irritate the pulp or cause it to become sensitive. Teeth whitening is also not recommended in pregnant or lactating women.

Tooth whitening does not usually change the color of fillings and other restorative materials. It does not affect porcelain, other ceramics, or dental gold.

