



Tooth Whitening

Tooth whitening (vital bleaching) is a simple and effective way to improve the natural colour of your teeth. Even stains from coffee, tea, tobacco, and red wine will fade away. The results are quite remarkable.

What is involved?

Patients wear individually constructed trays, which contain the whitening gel. These trays are a little like mouthguards but are extremely thin and only cover the teeth.

How long does it take?

Most cases take 4-5 applications but darker teeth will take longer.

Can whitening cause discomfort?

Whitening can cause *temporary* tooth sensitivity (dull ache and sensitivity to hot and cold). This may last for several hours or rarely up to several days, however, it always goes away and never leaves any residual problem.

Occasionally patients experience localised gum irritation which always resolves quickly.

If you experience tooth or gum sensitivity, simply shorten the whitening sessions to 45 minutes and perhaps skip a day or two between applications. Avoid acidic or citrus foods and try a desensitising toothpaste (Sensodyne™).

Is tooth whitening safe?

Yes. The active ingredient is 18% carbamide peroxide which breaks down to low concentrate hydrogen peroxide. This has been used for years as an oral antiseptic. Dentists have been using 35% hydrogen peroxide for over 50 years to whiten teeth and there have been no long term adverse effects with these stronger materials.

Are there any contraindications?

Although there is no evidence of problems, as a safety precaution, tooth whitening should be avoided during *pregnancy*. It is recommended to cease *smoking* during the tooth whitening process.

Does whitening work for everyone?

Tooth whitening is not suitable for every cosmetic case. I can assess if your teeth would respond favourably or not. Generally speaking, teeth that are discoloured from medication such as tetracycline, very old amalgam fillings or because they are non-vital, respond poorly to vital tooth whitening techniques.

Do all teeth whiten evenly?

Usually there is more improvement in darker teeth resulting in a more homogenous appearance. For particularly yellow teeth it is possible to selectively apply whitening gel on these areas for a longer period.

Professionally applied "power bleaching" can be used for especially stubborn teeth if desired.

In some patients, the whitening process results in a frosty appearance, but this reverts to a more natural translucent appearance after several weeks.

Do plastic and porcelain fillings change colour too?

No, but there are some qualifications. If a veneer is very thin over a yellow tooth, the whitening process will lighten the tooth underneath. The effect is an overall lightening but the veneer itself does not change.

Stained plastic fillings in between front teeth do not change much at all, but there is a degree of chameleon like effect when the surrounding tooth whitens and the fillings often appear to whiten a little as well. In any case, these old stained fillings can gradually be replaced to give a more aesthetic result.

Dr. Darren Donnellan B.D.Sc. (Melb)

General and Cosmetic Dentistry



How long does the whitening last?

Once the teeth have been whitened you will find that the result in colour is stable for 2 to 5 years. The teeth will gradually become yellow again caused by the same things that caused them to become yellow in the first place, i.e. ageing, smoking, tea, red wine, coffee, red berries etc. It is simple enough to rejuvenate the colour by periodic "touch ups". Extra whitening gel is inexpensive but don't forget to keep your trays.

How do I care for the gel & trays?

During the whitening process, be sure to rinse the used gel out between applications (it loses its effectiveness). Make sure that only **lukewarm** water is used because the trays will distort.

During the day time store the kit in the refrigerator. The whitening gel will remain effective for 12 months if stored in this way.

Do the whitening systems available on T.V. promotions and in pharmacies work as well?

Probably not, although these systems are improving. Many of them in the past were ineffective, tasted very poor and sometimes even damaged teeth.

Probably the most important difference between professionally supplied and over the counter systems is the custom-made trays in the former system. There is no comparison in relation to comfort and effectiveness. It is also worth noting that products such as "smoker's toothpaste" are very abrasive and remove enamel which results in the teeth actually becoming more yellow.

INSTRUCTIONS

These instructions are for an 18% carbamide peroxide gel

- Brush and Floss teeth prior to tray insertion
- Place a small amount of gel (match head size) into the lower half of the front surface of the tray for each tooth
- Insert tray onto teeth. If any excess oozes out, wipe away or spit out and apply less gel next time
- Wear for up to 2 hours
- Do not eat or drink while wearing tray
- Do not swallow gel
- Cigarette smoking should be avoided for the duration of the treatment.
- After removal, brush teeth and wash the inside of the tray using only cool water
- Repeat procedure 4-5 times on a daily basis. In most cases colour change is perceptible after 1-2 days, while some stains may take up to 10 days to lighten
- Tooth sensitivity and/or gum irritation can occur and usually settles quickly. If you experience problems simply shorten the whitening sessions to 45 minutes and perhaps skip a day or two between applications. Avoid citrus and acidic foods and use a desensitising toothpaste (e.g. Sensodyne™)
- Do not consume any staining food or drink during the whitening process and for 48 hours after completion
- Teeth darken naturally over the years, as will your whitened teeth. Simply repeat the steps for 1-2 nights to bring back their brightness
- Refrigerate whitening gel for long term storage
- Remember, if you have any concerns contact the surgery

553 Hampton Street, Hampton, 3188

Ph: 9598 3022 Fax: 9521 0625 Email: dent553@bigpond.net.au