

Teeth Whitening



What is teeth whitening?

Teeth whitening can be a very effective way of lightening the natural colour of your teeth without removing any of the tooth surfaces. It cannot make a complete colour change, but it may lighten the existing shade.

Why would I need my teeth whitened?

Very few people have brilliant white teeth, and our teeth can also become more discoloured as we get older. Your teeth can also be stained on the surfaces by food and drinks such as tea, coffee, red wine and blackcurrant. Smoking can also stain teeth.

Tartar can also affect the colour of your teeth. Some people may have staining under the surface, which can be caused by tiny cracks in the teeth which can take on stains.

What does tooth whitening involve?

Professional bleaching is the most usual method of tooth whitening. Your dentist will be able to tell you if you are suitable for the treatment, and will supervise it if you are. First the dentist will put a rubber shield or gel on your gums to protect them. They will then apply the whitening product to your teeth, using a specially made tray which fits into your mouth like a gum-shield.

The active ingredient in the product is usually hydrogen peroxide or carbamide peroxide. As the active ingredient is broken down, oxygen gets into the enamel on the teeth and the tooth colour is made lighter.

What about home kits?

The total treatment can usually be done within 2-3 weeks. First your dentist will need to make a mouth guard and will take impressions for this at the first appointment. Once the trays have returned your dentist will advise you on how to use them however, you will have to continue the treatment at home. You will regularly apply the whitening product over 2-4 weeks, for 30 minutes to 1 hour at a time.



What other procedures are there?

There is now laser whitening or power whitening; during this procedure a rubber dam is put over your teeth to protect the gums, and a bleaching product is painted on to your teeth. Then a light or laser is shone on the teeth to activate the chemical. The light speeds up the reaction of the whitening product and the colour change can be achieved more quickly, up to 5 shades lighter.



How long does laser whitening take?

Your dentist will need to assess your teeth to make sure that you are suitable for the treatment. Once it has been agreed, this procedure usually takes about one hour.

How much does teeth whitening cost?

You cannot get whitening treatments on the NHS. Private charges will be applied and this will vary from practice to practice. Laser or power whitening will cost more than home kits.

How long will my teeth stay whiter?

The effects of whitening are thought to last between 3-4 years. However, this will vary from person to person. The effects are likely to not last as long if you smoke, eat or drink teeth staining products such as coffee, blackcurrants and beetroot.



What about whitening toothpastes?

There are many whitening toothpastes available on the market. Although they do not affect the colour of your teeth, they may be effective at removing the staining. Therefore they may improve the overall appearance of your teeth.

Can a root treated tooth be whitened?

If the tooth has been root treated and starts to discolour the canal (which contained the nerve) may be reopened. The whitening product is then applied from the inside to whiten the tooth.

How can I look after my teeth once they have been whitened?

You can help to keep your teeth white by cutting down on the amount of food and drink you have that can stain teeth. Don't forget, stopping smoking can also help prevent discolouration and staining.

We recommend the following tips to care for your teeth:

- Brush your teeth for 2 minutes, twice a day with fluoride toothpaste.
- Cut down on how often you have sugary foods and drinks.
- Visit your dentist regularly, as often as they recommend.



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