

## Did You Know?

### **Time for T th Whitening?**

***The eyes may be the window to the soul, but the teeth may be the first thing others notice.***

You may find yourself self-conscious about your dingy teeth, and your thinking about whitening them. Dentists can perform or supervise various whitening procedures, and over-the-counter whitening products are available at drugstores and supermarkets. What's best for you depend on several things, including the type of discoloration and the amount of time and money you're willing to spend. There are two main types of whitening products. Some, specifically whitening toothpastes, remove surface stains by polishing with chemical agents or mild abrasives. These don't alter the tooth's natural color and can only lighten its appearance slightly. The other type of product contains a peroxide bleaching agent that changes the color of the tooth and can lighten by several shades.

The American Dental Association (ADA) recommends that you consult your dentist before using any bleaching product, even an over-the-counter one. Bleaching can be uncomfortable for people with sensitive teeth or gum recession. Also, most products will bleach only natural tooth enamel, so if you have tooth-colored fillings, crowns, veneers, or partial dentures, bleaching may yield uneven results. Your dentist can evaluate whether bleaching is right for your teeth, since different kinds of discoloration respond differently to whitening.

#### ***Dentist supervised procedures include:***

**In-office bleaching** - A neutralizing gel or a rubber shield is placed on your gums to protect them. Your dentist then applies a peroxide bleaching agent to your teeth and exposes them to a bright light or laser to hasten the lightening. Achieving the color you want usually takes three to four sessions, each lasting 30 to 60 minutes. A new technique called power bleaching, uses a highly concentrated form of hydrogen peroxide and requires only one session. In-office bleaching costs \$500 - \$1,200 for the whole mouth. Results generally last for one to three years.

**Dentist prescribed home-bleaching** - Your dentist takes an impression and makes a custom-fitted mouthpiece to hold the peroxide bleaching gel. You wear the gel-filled mouth piece for an hour or two every day, or overnight, for a week or two. Some users experience tooth sensitivity, but it usually subsides once the treatment is complete. Dentist-prescribed home bleaching for the whole mouth costs \$300 to \$600. Currently, 10% carbamide peroxide tray-applied gel is the only home-use whitener that carries the ADA Seal of Acceptance, which means that it meets ADA standards for safety and effectiveness.

#### ***Over-the-counter bleaching products:***

All of the following over-the-counter products contain peroxide as the active ingredient. The concentration is lower in these agents than the products dentists use, and the cost is substantially lower, ranging from \$20 - \$150.

**Whitening Strips** - You apply these thin, flexible pieces of plastic directly to the teeth, usually for a half-hour once or twice a day for five days to two weeks. The effects can last for up to 12 months.

**Gels** - All gels are similar, though some are applied with a small paintbrush and others come in a pen like applicator or are placed in a mouthpiece. Gels are typically applied daily before bedtime and left on overnight, usually for about two weeks. Effects may last up to six months.

**Whitening rinses** - Whitening rinses are swished through the teeth for 60 seconds twice a day before brushing and are used on an ongoing basis.

There is very little evidence on the long-term safety and effectiveness of tooth-whitening products or procedures. No over-the-counter bleaching products carry the ADA Seal of Acceptance, and the organization recommends consulting your dental professional before using them. Whitening products are not recommended for children under age 16, for women who are pregnant or breast feeding, for people with sensitive teeth or an allergy to peroxide, or for those with gum disease or worn tooth enamel. If any whitening products cause irritation or mouth sores, you should stop using it immediately and see your dentist.