

Tooth Whitening

What is tooth whitening?

Tooth whitening is a very effective way of lightening the colour of your teeth without removing any of the tooth surface and is one of the most popular cosmetic dental treatments currently available.

Why do I need to whiten my teeth?



Our teeth vary in colour, just as our skin and hair vary. Some people naturally have whiter teeth than others, but very few of us have brilliant white teeth. In addition, teeth can become stained on the surface by food and drinks such as tea, coffee and red wine. Smoking also stains teeth and our teeth tend to become more discoloured as we get older. Teeth can become discoloured after root filling and these can sometimes be lightened by applying gel from inside the tooth.

How is tooth whitening carried out?

Professional bleaching is the usual way to whiten teeth. Legally, this can only be carried out by a dentally trained and registered professional. 'Night whitening' is the commonest method and involves placing whitening gel into thin, comfortable custom trays, which we would make for you, which then fit over the teeth to be worn usually overnight or between meals during the day.

The active ingredient in the product is either hydrogen peroxide or carbemide peroxide. This active ingredient is broken down to produce oxygen which then lightens the surface of the enamel on the teeth.

Some dentists use laser or 'power' whitening. The gel is painted onto the teeth and a light or laser is shone onto the teeth to activate the chemical. This speeds up the reaction and makes the colour change more quickly. Often, treatment needs to be continued at home afterwards with further night whitening. As a practice we have chosen not to offer laser whitening as it tends to be more expensive than night whitening and can cause much greater sensitivity as it is more aggressive.

Tooth whitening can only lighten natural teeth. It will not work on fillings, crowns, veneers or denture teeth.

How long does it take?

The duration of treatment depends largely on you. In most cases it takes around two to six weeks to achieve a satisfactory result although we will try to give an indication of what you can expect. For severe staining, treatment may take longer. We will help monitor the colour change and provide further supplies of gel if required.

How much does tooth whitening cost?

Night whitening of both arches costs £285 (including 8 tubes of gel). Additional treatment of persistent staining would cost £15 per tube of gel (£55 for four tubes) and would need to be prescribed by your dentist.

Is it safe?

Yes. Tooth whitening with dentist supervision has been around for many years. Clinical studies have shown it to be safe if carried out by a dentally trained and registered professional. It can also help to reduce the need for more complex and damaging alternatives such as crowns and veneers.

Are there side effects?

Some patients experience sensitivity to hot or cold during the whitening process. Others may have discomfort in the gums or a sore throat. This is temporary and can be treated by discontinuing the whitening for a few days and using a fluoride mouthwash. The sensitivity normally disappears after 2 to 3 days. Very occasionally naturally occurring, invisible white marks on teeth can initially become more prominent but generally disappear once the remaining enamel is lightened to match it. If any side effects continue, please see your dentist.

How long will tooth whitening last?

The effects of tooth whitening can last up to about three years, but there may be a degree of darkening over time. Good oral hygiene helps to maintain the results. If you use staining substances such as tea, coffee, tobacco or red wine, you may wish to top up the effect by using gel for a few nights a year. Additional tubes of gel can be obtained on prescription from your dentist.

What about home whitening kits and toothpastes?

There are many home whitening kits available as paint-on whiteners or strips. How effective they are, depends upon how much active whitening agent they contain. Within the EU, regulations do not allow home whitening kits to contain sufficiently high enough levels of active ingredient to whiten teeth.

Whitening toothpastes do not affect the natural colour of your teeth, however they may be effective at removing staining. They may also help the effect of tooth whitening last longer.

Tooth whitening can only be achieved by professional bleaching.