

What to expect during the whitening treatment

Your dentist has given you a bleaching kit to take home with you together with your bleaching trays. It is essential that you follow the instructions given by your dentist and the manufacturer's instructions in wearing the trays and applying the bleaching agent. Below are answers to the most frequently asked questions.

Before Whitening is started:

X-rays

Before whitening, it's important to have x-rays of the back teeth to demonstrate that there is no decay. A single dark front tooth will always require an x-ray before we start whitening to check for any other problems that may be causing the discolouration. Some tests on the darker front teeth may be necessary to assess the vitality of the tooth before the whitening is started.

Sensitivity

Any previous history of sensitivity will need to be addressed. Patients with sensitivity should use the lowest concentration of whitening gel in their trays. Brush for at least 2 weeks before starting your whitening using a toothpaste that contains potassium nitrate (such as sensodyne). Potassium nitrate works by the potassium ion depolarising the nerves and therefore stops them from firing. The nerve impulses are thus desensitised and there is reduced pain.

How does the tooth whitening work?

The active ingredient (either carbamide or hydrogen peroxide) is broken down, allowing oxygen to enter the enamel and dentine, causing stains to be lighter.

How long should I wear the trays for?

This depends on the amount of lightening that you desire and the original shade of the teeth. If your teeth are quite dark or very yellow/grey/tetracycline stained it will take longer to bleach the teeth. You can wear the trays whilst sleeping (8 hours). It is very important to remove all the excess material around the gums or the palate prior to sleeping with the trays. The carbamide peroxide gel in your tray is active for up to 8 hours.

Normally teeth take 2-6 weeks to lighten. The darker your teeth are the longer your teeth will take to get lighter. Tetracycline stained teeth can take 6-12 months to lighten.

What do I do if I have sensitivity?

Sensitivity of teeth is the most common side effect of home bleaching (70 % of people experience sensitivity due to home whitening). This can range from a mild awareness to a

throb. In fact many patients suffer from sensitive teeth anyway. This occurs usually around the necks of the teeth where the gums have receded. If you are experiencing any sensitivity you can stop bleaching your teeth for one day. You can also place sensitive toothpaste into the bleaching trays for an hour a day. That will usually stop the sensitivity. Alternatively, you can rub the sensitive toothpaste into the gum margins with your finger a few times per day for a few days. If sensitivity continues you may need to stop the treatment. If you are at all concerned, please call your dentist as adjustments can be made to the trays if needed. Remember that the sensitivity is transient, and never has a patient been left with permanent sensitivity due to home bleaching.

What happens if the teeth do not whiten evenly?

You may notice new white spots occurring on the teeth while you are undertaking the bleaching treatment. These white spots were **already present** on the teeth before bleaching. The usual objective is to try and lighten the rest of the tooth so that the white spots are far less noticeable. Even though you may have not noticed them before, as the teeth become lighter they become more visible. Do not worry. As the whole tooth itself becomes lighter these spots will fade. You may notice these white spots immediately after a bleaching session or in the morning if you have been wearing the trays for the whole night. Exposed root surfaces do not readily respond to whitening so these may look more pronounced after whitening the top parts of the teeth.

Some teeth may appear banded with lighter/whiter areas. Again this banding is **originally** present on the tooth. As the tooth is dark these bandings are not obvious but as the tooth becomes lighter, the lighter parts of the tooth will lighten first followed by the darker banded area. After a week or so the bands will be less noticeable. Some patients have incisal translucency on their anterior teeth, which appears as a bluish halo. Some teeth will become more opaque on whitening and some more translucent.

Why will my teeth feel very clean after the whitening procedure?

Normally your teeth feel very clean after the bleaching process. The bleaching materials also have an indirect effect on the gums in helping them to heal or improving the health of the gums. This is how the technique was invented as it was first used to heal gum irritation during orthodontic treatment.

What about my smile?

Your smile will appear brighter as a bonus. It is very rare, but sometimes the teeth do not lighten at all. If this happens and you are wearing the bleaching trays as recommended, you may need to try a different bleaching product or a slightly higher concentration of the bleaching material. To accelerate results you may be asked to wear the trays for a longer period of time.

If you have white composite fillings in the front teeth that match the existing shade of your teeth before you bleach your teeth, they may not match the teeth afterwards. This is because your teeth will lighten, but the **fillings will not**. When the desired colour has been achieved, the dentist can replace these fillings with a lighter shade of filling to match the new shade of your teeth. Normally the dentist will wait 2-3 weeks before the changing fillings. Your **crowns** and **veneers** will also **not** whiten, you therefore must be aware that if you wanted these to match your natural teeth you may need them replacing after the whitening has been completed.

How long does the whitening last? Will I have to whiten my teeth again?

Normally the new white colour of your teeth keeps quite well. The effect is dependent on what has caused the teeth to discolour in the first place. If you drink lots of coffee, red wine, cola drinks your teeth may darken slightly. Once your teeth are whitened it usually lasts 1-3 years, however some people prefer to have touch ups every 6-12 months. Only if the shade drops will we recommend that you need topping up.

Does bleaching harm the teeth or gums?

1. Safety studies have shown that bleaching teeth using the dentist prescribed home bleaching technique is perfectly safe on the teeth, cheeks, gum and other tissues of the mouth. The bleaching material has a pH which is neutral.
2. Dentists have been using peroxide whitening for over 50 years and there have been no known adverse effects.

There are problems with the bleaching kits that are purchased over the counter or online. Although they are inexpensive, they normally contain an acid rinse, which can damage the teeth or thin down the enamel of the teeth. This acid rinse can be extremely harmful to the teeth. There was a case where a patient purchased the kit over the counter, bleached their teeth and their teeth went darker and the patient continued using the treatment. This was because the acid rinse had worn the enamel away and the darker shade was the dentine that was exposed.

It is not however advisable to bleach your teeth if you smoke. It is best to stop smoking for at least 3 weeks before commencing the bleaching procedure. Smoking causes the teeth to darken anyway and the effects will be diminished.

Contraindications:

Bleaching of the teeth is **not** recommended for pregnant, lactating patients or patients under the age of 18.

The active ingredient in teeth whitening is carbamide peroxide in a glycerine base. If you know of any allergy or adverse reaction to either ingredients then you **cannot** whiten your teeth.

Foods to avoid while bleaching and the 48 hours after completion

Colas, curries, beetroot, red wine, coffees, teas (including green tea), berries, candy, cranberry juice, pomegranate juice, prune juice tobacco products, mustard, ketchup, soya sauce, red sauces etc. These foods all have bright and strong colours which may affect the bleaching process. Avoid any foods that may stain a white t-shirt.

Additional ways to maintain your sparkling smile:

- Use an automated/electric toothbrush.
- Seek regular professional dental hygiene care to maintain oral health, keep staining to a minimum and determine the need for whitening touch ups.
- Practice good oral hygiene including care to maintain thorough tooth brushing, flossing to remove debris from between the teeth, and tongue cleaning. Your dental professional will assist you in selecting the products to maintain not only a white smile, but a healthy one as well.
- Avoid Corsodyl (or Chlorhexidine containing mouthwashes).

Shades of teeth (lighter through to darker shades)

B1, A1, B2, D2, A2, C1, C2, D4, A3, D3, B3, A3.5, B4, C3, A4, C4.