

PATIENT'S PAGE



This message brought to you by your dentist - a proud member of the Oklahoma Dental Association

TEETH Whitening – Basics for the Patient

What causes tooth discoloration?

There are many causes. The most common include consumption of foods, coffee, tea, wine, sodas and smoking. Age can also affect the appearance of our teeth – making them look dull in color.

What is involved with the teeth whitening process?

Teeth whitening is actually a bleaching process that lightens discolorations of tooth enamel. Teeth whitening can be performed in the dentist's office or at home.

- **In-office whitening**

If you are a candidate for bleaching, your dentist may suggest a procedure that can be done in his or her office. This procedure is called chairside bleaching and may require more than one office visit. Each visit may take from 30 minutes to a couple of hours. During chairside bleaching, the dentist will apply either a protective gel to your gums or a rubber shield to protect the oral soft tissues. A bleaching agent is then applied to the teeth, and a special light may be used to enhance the action of the agent. Lasers are also sometimes used during tooth whitening procedures to enhance the action of the whitening agent. Ask your dentist which is best for you.

- **At-home whitening**

There are several types of products available for use at home, which can either be dispensed by your dentist or purchased over-the-counter.

- Bleaching solutions: these products typically rely on carbamide peroxide as the bleaching agent. Usage regimens vary, and if you obtain the bleaching solution from your dentist, he or she can make a custom-fitted mouthguard for you that will fit your teeth precisely.
- Toothpastes: all toothpastes help remove surface stain through the action of mild abrasives. "Whitening" toothpastes have special chemical or polishing agents that provide additional stain removal effectiveness. Unlike bleaches, these toothpastes do not alter the intrinsic color of teeth.

Who may benefit from tooth whitening?

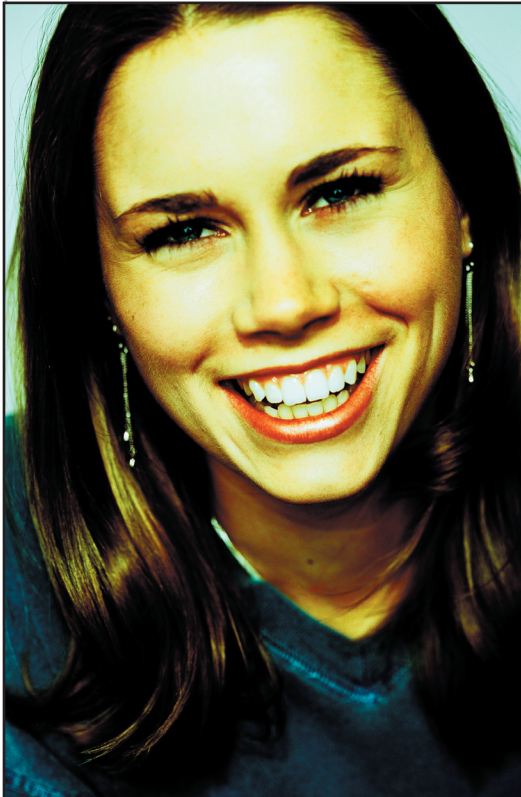
The answer is almost everyone. However, there are some cases where treatment may not be effective. Tooth lightening is ideal for patients who have healthy, unrestored teeth and would like a whiter, brighter smile; however, whiteners may not correct all types of discoloration. Bleaching may not enhance your smile if you have had bonding or tooth-colored fillings placed in your front teeth. The whitener will not affect the color of these materials, and they will stand out in your newly whitened smile. In these cases, you may want to investigate other options, like porcelain veneers or dental bonding. NOTE - Tetracycline discoloration and artificial dental work are usually not greatly responsive to dental bleaching.

Is the whitening process permanent?

For most people, the treatment will last for many years. However, exposure to foods, drinks (especially coffee, colas and red wines), smoking, and other consumables, will gradually darken teeth again over time. You may want to periodically bleach your teeth; after an initial treatment, most people do touchups once every 6-12 months.

Are there side effects to tooth whitening?

Some people experience temporary tooth sensitivity during treatment. In many cases, this sensitivity is temporary and should lessen once the treatment is finished. Some people also experience soft tissue irritation, either from an ill-fitting tray or from solution that may come in contact with the tissues. This irritation usually disappears within 1-3 days after beginning the procedure and always upon the discontinuation or completion of treatment. There are no other significant side effects. **NOTE - Pregnant or nursing women should not engage in dental bleaching.** If you have concerns about such side effects prior to or during your treatment, you should discuss them with your dentist.



ASK YOUR DENTIST!

He or she can tell you whether or not whitening procedures would be effective for you and which procedure is best suited for you.

Smile with confidence!

Don't settle for a smile you're not happy with. Even the most subtle change in your smile can make a dramatic difference in the way you look and feel about yourself. Ask your dentist about the many options available to you. Let your dentist know what your expectations are and he or she will help you make the choice that's best for you.