

## dental health

### Brighten your Smile at The Dentist's Office

By Kidane John Yohannes

It's no secret that we all want white, healthy looking teeth. Hygienically you want to have healthy teeth because it's clean. Aesthetically you want nice teeth because there is a palpable confidence that comes with having a nice smile. For these reasons, more and more people are looking to whiten their teeth. While teeth whitening isn't anything new, it's become more mainstream in recent years due to the do-it-yourself whitening kits that are widely available. But before you run out to whiten that smile of yours, it's important to educate yourself.

Whiter teeth can be achieved in a few different ways. What is known as chairside bleaching can be done at your dentist office. According to the American Dental Association, "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 used to activate the whitening agent." Chairside bleaching is normally completed in 30-minute sessions, over the course of one to three dentist visits. A huge plus for chairside bleaching, is that it offers immediate results, leaving teeth several shades whiter instantly. That said, these immediate results come at a high price; you can expect to pay \$400-\$600 for each session.

In the past, the most popular alternative to chairside bleaching was to have your dentist create custom fitted at-home bleaching trays. However in recent years, these fitted mouth trays, that held bleaching gel in place overnight, have given way to the new "kid" on the block: whitening strips. These plastic strips are coated with a bleaching agent, similar to that used by the dentist. The advantage is that they are sold over-the-counter, and allow people to whiten their teeth without going through a dentist visit. Starting at about \$25, the strips are affordable and sold at most drug stores.

As easy and convenient as these teeth whitening options sound, there are potential problems that need to be considered. One common, but often overlooked issue is over-whitening. When teeth are over-whitened, they can have an unnaturally white appearance. This is often called "toilet bowl teeth." Similarly, too much bleaching can wear away the enamel of the teeth, leaving a translucent blue or gray color. This is commonly called "skim milk teeth."

"Oversaturation, where you bleach the dentin and actually get a grey hue, may also cause breakdown in enamel...leading to tooth sensitivity, bleeding gums and sometimes stomachaches," says Dr. Ari Dubov.



Over-whitening usually occurs because people do not have a clear concept of how white their teeth should be. This disconnect is further clouded by the images of the "perfect teeth" that we see on television and in magazines. A rule of thumb to help avoid this problem, often cited by dentists, is to remember that healthy teeth should not be whiter than the whites of your eyes.

Another common pitfall that many people stumble into, is not considering the dental work that has already been done to their teeth. Porcelain veneers are not ideal for the bleaching process. A common result is a discoloration in the smile, where the natural teeth have been lightened and the veneers are not.

"It is always advisable to consult with your dentist prior to doing anything to your teeth," says Dr. Dubov, "a dentist can consider your complete medical history, which can be helpful in determining how your teeth became discolored, and if bleaching is an appropriate course of treatment."

### COSMETIC CHOICES FOR CHILDREN & TEENS

Children smile when they are proud of their teeth. At school and at play, they feel more confident. Your pediatric dentist can tell you about new treatments to enhance or restore your child's smile. Sally chipped her tooth on a swing set in fifth grade. Nick had an unfortunate encounter with a skateboard and a steep ramp. Julie wants a brighter smile when she goes onstage to accept her arts scholarship. They all should have a talk with a pediatric dentist. New dental treatments can create beautiful smiles - and the treatment does not have to break a parent's bank account.

### TREATMENT GOALS PROS & CONS

1. Whitening toothpastes brighten teeth and remove surface stains, but it does not lighten the color of the teeth, but it's very affordable.
2. Bleaching lightens and brightens the color of the teeth; very comfortable and it's affordable.
3. Microabrasion brightens discolored teeth and improves spots and stains on teeth, plus it's very comfortable and affordable.
4. Bonding and veneers restore discolored teeth and greatly improves the look of the teeth. It lasts for several years and it's comfortable.
5. Porcelain crowns restore discolored teeth and greatly improves the look of the them. Plus, it's very durable.

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