

# Home Tooth Whitening

**Your dentist has given you a tooth whitening kit to take home with you together with your whitening trays. It is essential that you follow the instructions given by your dentist and the manufacturers instructions in wearing the trays and applying the whitening agent.**

## For how long should I wear the trays?

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 it will take longer to whiten your teeth. If you are not experiencing any sensitivity you may wear the trays for at least 12 hours and even sleep with the trays in your mouth. It is very important to remove all the excess material around the gums or the palate prior to sleeping with the trays.

The darker the teeth, the longer your teeth will take to get lighter. Tetracycline stained teeth can take 6 months or up to one year to whiten. Some teeth can whiten after one month.

If you cannot wear the trays for a few days because of your hectic schedule it does not matter. Whiten your teeth according to your schedule. Some people put the trays in after dinner and wear them for the first hour while watching TV or doing the dishes. If everything is fine they replenish the trays and sleep with them in the mouth.

## What do I do if I have any sensitivity?

Sensitivity of teeth is the most common side effect of home teeth whitening. 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 should stop whitening your teeth for a few days. You can resume after 3-4 days. If the teeth become ultra-sensitive, you can place a sensitive toothpaste into the trays for an hour a day and that will usually stop the sensitivity. Alternately you can rub the sensitive toothpaste on to the gum margins with your finger 5 times a day for a few days. If you are concerned, contact your dentist.

## What happens if the teeth do not whiten evenly?

If the teeth have white spots on them before bleaching, these spots will appear whiter during the first few days of bleaching, however, the contrast between the spots and the rest of the tooth will be less and eventually they will not be noticeable. Sometimes the dentist can do a special procedure called Microabrasion for you where the white spots can be more permanently removed. Ask your dentist about the procedure if you are concerned about this.

You may notice new white spots occurring on the teeth while you are undertaking the whitening treatment. These white spots were already present on the teeth before whitening. As the teeth become lighter they become more visible. Do not worry. As the whole tooth becomes lighter these spots will fade.

Some teeth may appear banded with lighter/whiter areas. Again, these bandings were originally present on the tooth. The lighter parts of the tooth will lighten first followed by the darker banded area. After a week or so these will not be noticeable anymore.

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### **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 trays as recommended, you may need to try a different whitening product or a slightly higher concentration of the whitening material. The dentist can do a few “power whitening sessions” for you in the chair.

If you have white fillings in the front teeth that match the existing shade of your teeth before you whiten your teeth, they may not match the teeth afterwards. This is because the teeth can lighten, but the fillings do not. When the desired colour has been achieved, the dentist can replace these fillings with a lighter shade of filling material to match the new shade of your teeth. Normally the dentist will wait a week before changing the fillings.

### **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, the effect may darken slightly. Some patients do a top up treatment after 3 – 4 years. Some patients do not need to. Your dentist will normally ask you to return your trays after the desired shade of lightening has been achieved. This is to ensure that you do not over whiten your teeth.

### **Does whitening harm the teeth or gums?**

Safety studies have shown that whitening teeth using the dentist’s prescribed home whitening technique is perfectly safe on the teeth, cheeks, gum and tissue of the mouth. Whitening the teeth with the dentist’s prescribed kits is equivalent to drinking one soda drink. The whitening material has a pH which is neutral.

There are problems with the whitening kits that are purchased over the counter. 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.

It is not advisable to whiten your teeth if you smoke. It is best to stop smoking for at least 3 weeks before commencing the whitening procedure.

The technique of whitening teeth is not for everybody. There are some situations where whitening teeth is contraindicated such as where the front teeth are already crowned or where there are very large fillings on the front teeth or where the teeth are already excessively worn and there is tooth surface loss. The most ideal situation is where there is not much wrong with the teeth except for the colour which has become more yellow with age.

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