

Tooth Whitening FAQs

What is tooth whitening?

It's an oxidising process that lightens the colour of enamel and dentine. The system we recommend uses a gel retained in a custom fitted appliance worn over your teeth while you sleep. As the active ingredient in the gel is broken down oxygen enters the dentine and enamel and whitens any stains. The structure of the tooth is not changed. The tooth is just lighter and brighter.

What causes tooth discolouration?

There are many causes including ageing, drinking coffee, tea, coke and red wine, smoking, trauma, tetracycline (antibiotic) staining, dead teeth and old silver fillings. Some people have genetically inherited teeth which are darker in colour. Changes in temperature of foods and drinks cause the teeth to expand and contract which allows the coloured proteins from tea, coffee etc. to penetrate the teeth. Foods that are acidic also open up microscopic cracks in the enamel and allow stains to move in.

Who can benefit from tooth whitening?

Almost everyone. However there are some cases where the treatment may not be appropriate. Tooth whitening will not change the colour of existing fillings or crowns. So if you have a lot of fillings or crowns at the front of your mouth another cosmetic procedure may give you a better result. If you would like new crowns or fillings it is sensible to whiten the natural teeth first then match the fillings or crowns to the brighter, lighter teeth! The tooth whitening system is ideal for patients who have healthy un-restored teeth and would like to have a brighter smile. Teeth tend to change shade (usually yellow) with age. These changes can be reversed. Some people inherit darker teeth in much the same way as differences in hair and skin colour. This can also be changed. Stains in the grey family (such as tetracycline antibiotic staining) can be more stubborn (but still possible) to treat.

Is tooth whitening safe?

Yes. Research has shown that whitening teeth is safe for the gums and teeth under the supervision of a dentist. The custom fitted trays isolate the gel to the teeth that need to be whitened and keeps contact with gum tissue to a minimum.

How long does it take?

Some results are usually seen in the first night. Maximum results generally occur when the process is continued for 10 to 14 nights. (or 10—14 days when worn for a 3 hour session each day)

Why don't you use a laser/light in the surgery to whiten teeth?

Some dentists will use a blue light to whiten teeth (sometimes called Zoom Whitening) This usually takes a couple of hours. It does give immediate results, however research has shown most of the whitening effect is due to extreme drying of the tooth and the whitening is only temporary, and it costs you more.

Are there any side effects?

Some people experience increased tooth sensitivity to cold during treatment. These symptoms can be controlled and **always** disappear within 1-3 days after interruption or completion of the treatment.

How long will the results last?

Your teeth will always be lighter than they were. However you may need periodic 'touch ups' for one or two nights every 6 to 12 months to keep them fabulous especially if you continue to smoke or drink coffee, red wine etc. You can still use your original trays and should you need further whitening gel we can provide this for you at a reduced cost.

How do you do it?

Your dentist will take upper and lower moulds of your teeth. This takes about 10 minutes. These are sent to the dental technician who will construct thin, clear close fitting trays for your teeth. We try these in at the surgery about a week later and give you the whitening gel in syringes. Your dentist will show you how to place the gel in the trays. We will record the colour of your teeth. This appointment again takes about 10 to 20 minutes. You then use your trays loaded with gel for 10 to 14 nights, until your teeth reach the desired shade. Keep any extra gel safe (in the fridge ideally). You can use for 'touch ups' later on. We will check your shade at your next routine examination. Any problems please ring us... and above all

Enjoy your bright new smile!