

Oral Health Tips

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Tooth whitening: Is it right for you?

Start by talking to your dentist to help assess your need for tooth whitening. Many people maintain a pleasing white smile by flossing, brushing with a fluoride toothpaste, and having their teeth cleaned at their dentist's office as needed. Teeth naturally exhibit many different shades and a dazzlingly bright white coloration is not normally seen in most people. In addition, tooth color should blend with an individual's complexion and other facial features. If tooth whitening is needed, a number of options are now available. These include in-office bleaching, at-home bleaching (dispensed by your dentist or over-the-counter) and whitening toothpastes.

Why Do Teeth Discolor?

- Tooth surface discoloration that can be removed when teeth are professionally cleaned may be caused by certain foods, coffee, tea and tobacco, and by deposits of tartar (calculus).
- Tooth discoloration that goes deeper than just the tooth surface may be caused by childhood doses of the antibiotic tetracycline, certain illnesses, injury, and excessive fluoride. In some cases, bleaching can successfully lighten some of these discolorations.

When Is Tooth Whitening Not Effective?

- Only natural tooth structure can be lightened, not tooth colored fillings, tooth colored bonded restorations, crowns or veneers.
- In situations where whitening is not effective, you may want to investigate other alternatives like veneers or dental bonding.

Tooth Whitening Options

- Professionally supervised and over-the-counter bleaching procedures and products that use peroxide(s) to bleach tooth enamel are available.

- At the present time, only certain in-office bleaching products and dental office dispensed home-use bleaching products carry the ADA Seal of Acceptance.
- Dentists can perform bleaching in the office, or make custom-fitted mouth guard trays to fill with an appropriate peroxide gel for overnight bleaching at home.
- Whitening toothpastes with the ADA Seal may provide extra stain removal because they contain special chemical and polishing agents.

Different people's teeth react differently to bleaching. While tooth whitening procedures have become common, every person is different and must decide whether tooth whitening is a suitable and desirable option. Some individuals experience temporary tooth sensitivity or gum irritation from bleaching agents. A good place to start is by talking to your dentist to help assess your need for tooth whitening.

Source: American Dental Association: www.ada.org

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