

Topping up: If the treatment is carried out correctly the colour of the teeth once the treatment is complete, should remain the same for at least 18 - 24 months.

Topping up should be carried out under the guidance of a dentist using the same type of gel used during the initial treatment.

Dentists prescribe tooth whitening gels that contain either hydrogen peroxide or carbamide peroxide. These substances break down into oxygen and water.

The oxygen travels through the enamel (outer layer of the tooth) into the dentine (middle layer of the tooth) where the oxygen cleanses out the impurities that cause the tooth to appear discoloured, this cleansing action creates a 'lighter' appearance.

Home Whitening: Dentist-supervised home whitening:

This is essentially the same as chair-side whitening except that, once you've had your mould made, your dentist will instruct you how to perform the rest of the whitening treatment in your own home.

The treatment involves having dental impressions (moulds) taken, a special mouth guard is made specifically for the patient.

Hydrogen peroxide or Carbamide peroxide gel is applied to the tray, with the patient wearing the tray for a specific length of time.

While in-office whitening is considered to be much quicker and more effective, many appreciate at-home whitening for its ease of use and lower cost.

Safety of tooth whitening

The research shows that tooth whitening is safe.

A suitably trained dental professional such as a dentist, dental hygienist or dental therapist can discuss and provide safe and appropriate options for treatment based on their knowledge of the patient's oral health and their individual therapeutic needs.

Why go to a dentist when home whitening kits are available?

When dealing with a bleaching agent such as peroxide, it is possible to burn yourself.

As a result, DIY home kits, including teeth whitening strips, cannot be sold at the same strength as professionals would use.

This means they will be less effective, or require a more frequent use to achieve the same results. This, in turn, could lead to gum irritation and sensitive teeth. Incorrect use or overuse of bleach could also damage the enamel, which is why these treatments should be avoided, even if they appear cheaper than professional treatment.

Is teeth whitening painful?

Most people find that their teeth are much more sensitive for the next couple of days following treatment.

This is not usually experienced as a constant pain, but intermittent bursts of discomfort. It's recommended that you avoid especially hot or cold food or drink for around 24-48 hours after treatment.

Your dentist will provide advice on how to manage the short-term pain after treatment.

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Will the effects be permanent?

No. Your teeth will still be susceptible to staining after the treatment. This means the effect will fade, particularly if you drink tea, coffee, and red wine or are a smoker.

The whitening offered by bleaching kits tends to offer more enduring results than laser treatment effects but takes longer to achieve.

It is also recommended:

- Brushing your teeth twice daily with a fluoride tooth paste. Brushing before bed and one other time during the day is advised. Cleaning between the teeth daily with dental floss or interdental sticks or brushes helps to maintain good oral health
- Reduce the frequency of sugary drinks and snacks
- Visit your dental team regularly to maintain a good level of oral health.

Potential Problems

There are some risks and limitations associated with bleaching procedures.

Fortunately, the problems experienced are very uncommon and usually minor in nature. Some things to be aware of:

1. **Tooth sensitivity** – During the whitening procedure some people might experience tooth sensitivity. This sensitivity is usually mild and typically does not last. If the discomfort persists, a mild pain killer like Myprodol is usually effective. Using various de-sensitizing products as recommended by a dental professional sensitivity can be successfully managed so that treatment can be completed.
2. **Gum Irritation** - Temporary inflammation of the gums and other soft tissue can occur during your whitening. This is generally the result of the whitening gel coming in to contact with the gums. The irritation it is generally short-lived and disappears as

soon as the gel is removed. A mouth rinse can be useful.

3. **Existing fillings and other restorations** – Tooth coloured fillings, crowns or veneers, will not whiten during this procedure. Please be aware that dental restorations such as these might need to be replaced if you feel they do not match your new, whiter smile.
4. There are many whitening toothpastes available, on the whole whilst they do not change the colour of natural teeth, they can help to remove surface stains on the teeth, such as tea, coffee, red wine etc.
5. Home whitening kits available over the counter are usually less expensive than professional tooth whitening at a dental practice, however not always assessed for safety, increasing the risk of damage to the gums and teeth. The acidic nature of these gels can also be harmful.

Cost of treatment

Fees for professional tooth whitening by a dental professional vary from practice to practice and also depending on the area of the country. In-surgery is often more expensive than home whitening treatments.

- Whitening treatments can be effective on both extrinsic and intrinsic staining.
- Only natural teeth can be whitened; in most cases, tooth-colored restorations will not bleach.
- Whitening treatments include in-office bleaching procedures, dentist-supplied products for use at home, and over-the-counter (OTC) whiteners.
- Carbamide peroxide and hydrogen peroxide are commonly used in whitening interventions and can readily permeate dental hard tissues.
- Temporary tooth sensitivity and gingival inflammation are the most common adverse effects.

What is tooth whitening?

Teeth are often stained from smoking, food, drink (coffee, tea, red wine), or poor oral hygiene and can also discolour following root canal treatments.

Tooth whitening is an effective and efficient way to lighten the appearance of natural teeth without removing the any tooth surface, such as the enamel. Whitening the teeth is a very successful and easy way of eliminating most external and some internal stains from your teeth without causing any damage.

Over the years enamel is worn down, becoming more transparent and permitting the yellow colour of dentin — the tooth's core material - to show through, giving the teeth a darker appearance. It has also been shown that during routine chewing, millions of micro-cracks occur in the enamel.

It is these cracks, as well as the spaces between the enamel's crystalline structures, that gradually fill up with stains and debris. As a result, the teeth eventually develop a darker, lacklustre appearance.

Teeth whitening removes the stains and debris, leaving the enamel cracks open and exposed. Some of the cracks are quickly re-mineralized by saliva, while others are filled up again with organic debris.

Who is whitening appropriate for?

Anyone with a healthy mouth should benefit from a teeth whitening treatment.

However, if you have gum disease or other dental problems, your dentist may decide that teeth whitening will not be suitable, until successfully treated.

You should also be aware that whitening will only work on natural teeth; false teeth, crowns, bridges, fillings and veneers will be unresponsive to the process. This could potentially leave your with teeth with uneven colouration.

If you have de-calcifications (white spots) on your teeth, these might actually become more noticeable after bleaching. It's important that during the pre-treatment consultation you understand the need and cost for additional treatment to replace crowns, veneers and fillings.

Treatment has been successfully carried out by professionals for decades and millions of people worldwide have benefited from this treatment.

Before tooth whitening treatment is carried out The dentist should carry out a full examination of your mouth, checking your teeth for any signs of decay, broken teeth or fillings.

The health of your gums should be assessed, dental radiographs (x-rays) may be necessary to detect decay or abscesses.

The soft tissues such as tongue cheeks, lips and palate should also be examined to ensure they are healthy.

Once the examination is complete the dentist should record the shade of teeth and then discuss the most appropriate treatment that will achieve the desired result.

A plan outlining the recommended treatment should be presented, including the fees. You should also be given the opportunity to ask questions relating to the planned treatment.

Can I get my teeth whitened at a beauty salon?

In South Africa, the regulator, The Health Professions Council of South Africa has determined that aesthetic and cosmetic procedures may only be carried out by dentists, dental therapists and oral hygienists.

Therefore, non-dental professionals, such as beauticians cannot carry out tooth whitening treatments.

Teeth whitening must only be performed after a clinical examination by a qualified dentist.

Illegal tooth whitening conducted by unlicensed practitioners without dental training who use too much hydrogen peroxide could result in permanent damage to teeth and gums and should be avoided at all costs.

Treatment options

There are 2 types of tooth whitening treatment available: home whitening and in-surgery 'power' whitening

In-Surgery Whitening: As the name suggests, this treatment is carried out by a dentist, dental hygienist or dental therapist in the dental surgery.

Chair-side whitening: This method will take a couple of weeks and require multiple trips to your dentist. After a consultation, your first appointment will involve having a mould of your teeth cast using dental putty. Over the next 5-10 days a technician will use this mould to create a custom-made tooth whitening tray for you. Once the tray is ready, you'll go back to the dentist who will perform the whitening process.

First, a protective gel or a rubber shield will be applied to your gums. Then, the tooth whitening tray is filled with a bleaching agent and worn like a mouth guard. The agent will oxidise stains and get into the enamel and dentine of the teeth, lightening their shade. This will take 30 minutes to an hour. Depending on the look you are trying to achieve, you may need to come back a few more times.

These days, dentists more commonly use a method of isolating the gum tissue with a barrier material and then applying the peroxide gel directly on to the front surface of the tooth. This may or may not be used in conjunction with a white light as a catalyst, depending on the product.

On completion of the treatment, the patient is should continue with the home whitening trays at home for a specified period of time to ensure the desired result is achieved. The treatment may be used as a 'top up' procedure or suitable for a patient with a naturally lighter shade of teeth.