

# Dental bleaching

## What is dental bleaching?

Dental bleaching involves the application of a peroxide-based gel to the teeth in order to remove undesirable discolouration. Vital tooth discolouration can have various causes. First, the teeth may be superficially covered with an accumulation of dental plaque and/or tartar. Frequent consumption of coffee, tea or red wine or the use of tobacco products causes these deposits to become discoloured. A simple dental treatment (cleaning and polishing) by a dental hygienist is sufficient to eliminate these superficial stains. Discolouration may also occur in the teeth's enamel or dentin. Natural aging, food, the use of tobacco products, certain medications in the tetracycline family, excessive fluoride ingestion at a young age and cavities may potentially cause discolouration within a tooth. To eliminate this type of discolouration, dental bleaching is recommended. However, since some discolourations react better to bleaching than others, it is important to have a dental exam performed by a dentist and receive a diagnosis.



## What are the different methods available for bleaching teeth?

**There are three bleaching methods:**

- 1) At-home tooth-bleaching kits with custom-made mouth trays.
- 2) Tooth bleaching in the dentist's office.
- 3) Over-the-counter whitening products.

You should discuss the different methods of dental bleaching with your dentist, as well as the effectiveness, risks, advantages and costs of each of these procedures. This leaflet deals with at-home dental bleaching under the supervision of a dentist.



## What are the steps involved in dental bleaching at home?

Your dentist must first clean your teeth and perform a complete dental exam to ensure you do not have any cavities or defective dental restorations. Then your dentist will determine the cause of the tooth discolouration — a crucial step, since the duration and cost of the bleaching treatment will vary depending on the type and intensity of the discolouration. The dentist will then make an impression of your teeth and create a cast. This is done by heating a plastic sheet and moulding it over your teeth, then transferring the impression to the cast. From this, a plastic dental tray is made that fits perfectly over your teeth. You will need to place a small amount of a peroxide-based gel in the tray, which can be worn day or night depending on your preference and schedule. On average, treatments last from two to six weeks. However, teeth that are discoloured by nicotine or medications like tetracycline may require two to six months of treatment.

## How long do the teeth remain white after a treatment?

This varies greatly among patients and depends on their habits. For most people, the effect lasts from one to three years. Some people find that their teeth will stay white for several years following a single bleaching treatment of a few days.

## What are the risks associated with at-home dental bleaching?

**Possible side effects from bleaching at home are:**

- a) **Tooth hypersensitivity:** two out of three patients develop tooth sensitivity during treatment. This sensitivity is generally temporary and will disappear when the treatment is stopped. If such sensitivity to heat, cold or breathing occurs during the treatment period, stop the treatment and consult your dentist, who may prescribe a neutral fluoride solution or a toothpaste for sensitive teeth to place in your tray for 30 minutes over several days, to eliminate the sensitivity. Your dentist will explain the procedures to follow in order to resume the bleaching treatment.
- b) **Gum irritation:** Gum sensitivity may be caused by a poorly fitted tray with rough edges that can irritate your gums or neighbouring soft tissues (cheeks, mucous membranes of the mouth). It may also be due to putting too much gel in the tray, causing the overflow to irritate your gums to the point of creating small ulcers. In either case, you should stop the treatment immediately and consult your dentist.
- c) **Throat irritation:** Too much gel may also cause the product to overflow while you are inserting the tray into your mouth. If you inadvertently swallow the excess instead of spitting it out in the sink, throat irritation may result. This will not last long if you remember to always spit out and not continue to swallow excess gel.
- d) **Jaw discomfort:** You may feel some discomfort in your jaws. This is normally caused by the fact that your teeth do not close fully when you are wearing the tray, due to its thickness. If you have any concerns about this, speak to your dentist.

### Who should avoid bleaching treatments?

- 1) Pregnant or lactating women.
- 2) People who wear braces.

Note that for patients whose immune system is weakened due to a serious illness, a joint decision with your dentist is essential in order to determine whether a bleaching treatment is appropriate or whether it should be postponed to a later date. For those with chronic heartburn or major temporomandibular joint problems (TMJ), the dentist will advise you as to the frequency, duration and proper time of day for the treatment. People suffering from bruxism (teeth grinding) should wear the intraoral appliance during the day to avoid wearing it out prematurely.

### Usage recommendations

- 1) Brush your teeth well and floss before starting treatment.
- 2) Do not smoke while using a bleaching product.
- 3) Do not eat or drink during the bleaching treatment.
- 4) Keep the bleaching product away from any heat source.
- 5) Unused syringes may be placed in the refrigerator.
- 6) Start treatment on just one dental arch, using the tray. At the follow-up visit, if there are no problems, the dentist will tell you whether you can continue the treatment with two trays at a time.

It is important that dental bleaching be done under the supervision of your dentist. By performing a dental exam and asking general and medical questions, the dentist can diagnose the cause of the discolouration and estimate the length of treatment, as well as the total cost and chances of success. It is difficult to predict the final result, and no guarantee can be given. However, most patients notice an improvement one to four weeks after starting the treatment.



### Informed consent

Your prognosis is: Good  Average  Unfavorable

Informed consent is the result of a discussion between the patient and the dentist. This document is provided for information purposes and may be completed or modified during discussions with your dentist. Some dentists may provide adequate information without giving this document to the patient.

### Explanations

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### Informed consent for at-home bleaching

I understand the nature and limitations of the at-home bleaching treatment using a tray and peroxide-based gel. I also understand that composite and porcelain restorations and crowns will not change colour and will probably have to be redone after this treatment. In addition, there will be a two-week delay after bleaching before restorations are replaced or aesthetic restorations are performed on previously restored teeth. I also understand that I must attend the follow-up appointments and follow the instructions given to me. I further understand that, even if the initial prognosis is good, any of the complications mentioned in this leaflet may occur, which would obligate me to slow or end the treatment.

I have discussed all of the foregoing with my dentist and he/she has answered all of my questions. I hereby consent to the treatment.

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Patient's signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dentist's signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date