

Teeth Whitening Facts: Research Report*

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Teeth Whitening

Teeth whitening is the process of removing stains and discolouration from teeth through a bleaching process to make them look "whiter".

For heavily stained teeth, a procedure as simple as a scale and polish from a dental hygienist can significantly improve their appearance and make them look "whiter".

What are the different types of teeth whitening available from a dentist?

Most dental practices offer two types of whitening:

1. Laser / in-surgery Teeth Whitening
2. Professional home whitening kits

Both procedures are based on a bleaching process that uses a peroxide-based bleaching gel of varying strength (3%-30% peroxide). The higher the concentration of peroxide in the gel, the more powerful it is. While a higher concentration gel is more effective at whitening the teeth, it also has greater potential to cause side effects such as sensitivity and damage to the surrounding gum tissue and your lips.

Laser Teeth Whitening

Laser teeth whitening or in-surgery whitening is a procedure that takes place at the dental practice and uses a light-activated bleaching gel to whiten your teeth. The procedure usually takes approx 1 -2 hours and produces instant whitening results. Many dentists recommend that laser whitening should be followed up by professional home whitening.

The laser Teeth Whitening procedure

Prior to carrying out the procedure you would have a consultation with your dentist to make sure that you are suitable for teeth whitening and to explain possible risks and side effects of the procedure. Most dental practices will ask you to sign a teeth whitening consent form to confirm that you have fully understood the procedure and all risks.

Before the teeth whitening process is started a dentist or a hygienist will thoroughly clean the teeth, removing any surface stains and tartar. This

procedure is commonly referred to as a scale and polish.

The next step will be for the dentist to make a record of the shade/colour of the teeth before the procedure. This is either recorded using a tooth coloured shade guide/chart or by taking a digital photograph of your teeth.

The area is then prepared for the procedure. The bleaching compound usually contains a high concentration of peroxide (15-30%) and so the dentist will usually place some form of protection around the gums so that only the teeth are exposed to the compound. This involves covering the gums with rolls of cotton and a protective gel material that hardens once applied to the gums. A cheek retractor is used to keep the lips and cheeks away from the teeth.

It is very important that your dentist isolates your gums and lips with a protective material in order to avoid any potential damage or burning. Home whitening kits usually have a low concentration of peroxide so that there is less chance of any damage occurring. *Recently, high-strength home whitening kits purchased online and from certain stores have attracted media attention with horror stories of people with badly burnt lips and gums. It's for this reason that teeth whitening should always be carried out under the supervision of a dentist.*

Eye protection (goggles) is also provided to prevent any damage to the eyes from the laser used or any accidental splashes of the peroxide. Many cosmetic practices now offer "DVD glasses" so that the patient can watch a movie during their treatment!

The whitening gel is then applied to the surface of the teeth and exposed to a light or laser, which activates it. Some systems do not use an activating laser and many dentists argue that the laser doesn't make any difference to the end result.

During this process if you feel that your lips or gums start to burn then you should let your dentist know immediately. After approximately 15 minutes the gel is removed and the process repeated another 2 times. During the procedure some people may feel sensitivity in their teeth, which are described as short-lived shooting pains.

The dentist will finally wash off the whitening gel and remove any gum protection before evaluating the final result by taking a photograph or using a shade chart. The results are usually quite dramatic and can often be up to 10 shades lighter. A kit for home whitening may also be provided with custom trays and professional whitening gel.

Many patients' teeth are quite sensitive immediately following this procedure and it is advised to try and avoid hot or cold drinks for a while. Some dentists offer fluoride treatment following teeth whitening to reduce this effect on sensitivity.

Your home whitening kit usually contains a solution to reduce tooth sensitivity.

Sensitivity rarely lasts more than 48 hours, if symptoms persist for longer than this then contact your dentist.

Once your treatment is complete your dentist will remove the gel and a shade guide will then be used to measure how much whiter your teeth have become during the procedure. The results are instant and can often be up to 10 shades lighter.

Professional home whitening kits provide more permanent results over a longer time scale, whereas laser tooth whitening offers immediate results. A combination of the two provides the perfect solution to both immediate and long-term whitening needs.

Professional home whitening kits

To make a professional home whitening kit, your dentist will take an impression (mould) of your teeth using a special dental putty. Your dentist's technician will then use this to cast a model of your teeth from plaster and make your custom teeth whitening trays from this.

Once these trays have been made (usually takes 5-10 days) you use them in combination with professional whitening gel (provided by your dentist) until you are happy with the results. Depending on the teeth whitening system, some trays need to be worn overnight while others for only 1-2 hours a day.

Suitability for whitening

Many people are not suitable for teeth whitening and a dentist will assess your suitability during a consultation. If you have gum disease or other dental health problems, you may not be suitable.

The teeth whitening process does not change the colour of crowns, veneers or fillings so it is important to understand that you may need to change these to match the colour of your whitened teeth.

How much whiter will my teeth look?

This varies from individual to individual, and also depends on the type of whitening system used. Some people respond very well to teeth whitening and have dramatically whiter teeth as a result, whereas others may notice very little difference at all.

People with heavily stained yellow teeth tend to have more dramatic results than those with slightly discoloured teeth. Your dentist will be able to advise you on the likely results following a consultation.

Does it hurt? What are the side effects of teeth whitening?

Some people experience no pain or . However, the majority of people will experience some kind of sensitivity either during and/or after the initial treatment. This is usually described by patients as sporadic, sharp shooting pains coming from their teeth. This should settle down after approximately 48 hours though. Your dentist may give you a special gel or mousse to apply to your teeth to help with the sensitivity. It is advisable to avoid hot or cold food and drinks within the first 48 hours of your whitening treatment.

Which teeth-whitening brand or system is the best?

There are many different brands of professional teeth-whitening systems, each claiming to provide the best results. The most popular systems are Zoom!®, as featured on *Extreme Makeover*, Opalescence®, BriteSmile® and the latest Enlighten system. Each system has its pros and cons, and your dentist will be able to advise you on which system would be best suited for your teeth.

How much does teeth whitening cost?

This depends on many different factors, including:

- The specific clinic where your whitening is performed.
- The teeth-whitening system used.
- The location of the clinic.
- The skill of the dentist performing the treatment.

Reviewed by: Dr Amjad Malik from www.cosmeticdentistryguide.co.uk

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Enlighten deep bleaching

Enlighten deep bleaching claims to whiten "even the darkest of teeth", giving more reliable and dramatic results than home kits or power bleaching.

How does Enlighten deep bleaching work?

Your dentist first takes an impression of your teeth so that custom-made deep bleaching trays can be produced. Following this, each night for 14 consecutive nights, the trays are to be worn in conjunction with a gentle whitening gel. On day 15, you should visit your dentist for a one-hour deep bleaching treatment to really whiten the teeth. This can result in teeth appearing up to 14-16 shades lighter.

How long do the effects of Enlighten deep bleaching last?

To maintain this effect, the trays should be worn for one night every eight weeks. This technique has been found to be successful, with approximately 95% of all cases achieving shade B1 or even lighter. If used correctly, the results of deep bleaching can be permanent.

The treatment's success is due to the unique design of the bleaching tray, as it allows maximum contact between the whitening gels and the teeth. These gels are specially created to minimise sensitivity while allowing a longer duration of effect.

Does Enlighten deep bleaching cause sensitivity?

As with all teeth-whitening treatments, patients may encounter some sensitivity when using the Enlighten system. However, the treatment combats this temporary effect by providing a desensitising swab, original to the Enlighten system, that can be used at home.

If maintained correctly, there is no reason why you should not benefit from the effects of the system forever, and your dentist will be happy to advise you of all maintenance guidelines so you can continue appreciating the benefits of your treatment.

BriteSmile Teeth Whitening

BriteSmile whitening system uses a unique blue light in conjunction with a whitening gel to speed up the lightening process, and lightens your tooth colour by up to 14 shades in one hour. The system is clinically proven to be safe and effective, and claims to give a natural and uniform result.

What does the BriteSmile Teeth Whitening procedure involve?

The procedure for treatment is simple. First, your dentist will examine your teeth and gums to check that you are in good enough oral health for the procedure. Next, the whitening gel is applied to your teeth and then the blue light is focused on your teeth to activate the gel - restoring your teeth to their natural whiteness. The treatment is safe and does not damage the enamel layer or any existing fillings. BriteSmile's gel uses 10% hydrogen peroxide, which is much lower than many other whitening gels (which can contain up to 35%-50%).

What should I expect following BriteSmile teeth whitening?

Following the treatment, a small percentage of patients may experience a slight dull ache, but in the vast majority of cases, a painkiller is sufficient to remedy this. It is also advisable to avoid excessively hot or cold drinks for the first 24 hours, especially if any tooth sensitivity is experienced.

Although BriteSmile averages a lightening achievement of more than 8 shades, results will vary according to your starting shade and teeth. More severe discolouration may require lengthier treatment.

How long the results last will also depend upon the individual. Consumption of tobacco products, coffee, tea and red wine can partly reverse the results achieved. BriteSmile also has a range of whitening maintenance products to help maintain your new smile for approximately 1-2 years.

BriteSmile treatment is suitable for many people, including those suffering from severe tooth discolouration. It is ideal for young adults aged 14 years or over, especially those who have heavy staining as a result of wearing braces.

The process is not recommended during pregnancy or nursing, or during orthodontic or extensive dental treatment. Your dentist will review your suitability at the consultation stage.

Opalescence teeth-whitening systems

Opalescence offers a range of teeth-whitening treatments.

The **Trèswhite** system comes with preloaded whitening trays to make applications easier and less messy. The trays are simply placed onto your teeth and adhere quickly, ensuring they remain in place for the one-hour development time each day. Using a high concentration of peroxide, desired results are quickly achieved, with some patients witnessing results in only one day.

The system 's whitening gel contains both fluoride and potassium nitrate, proven to remineralise the teeth and prevent cavities forming. To maintain your new lighter shade, Opalescence's whitening toothpaste is suggested, as it contains high levels of fluoride, and is available from your dentist.

Another system from Opalescence is its **Tooth Whitening System**. Your dentist simply takes impressions of your teeth so custom trays can be made. Next, whitening gel is placed in the trays and then fitted over your teeth.

Carbamide peroxide in the gel breaks down and allows oxygen to permeate the enamel layer and dentin. This bleaches any discolouration on your teeth without altering the tooth structure.

Results are, again, quickly apparent - sometimes in as little as one night, although for optimum results, the process should be continued for 7-10 days. Your dentist will advise you on your individual requirements.

To maintain your new, bright smile, good oral hygiene is important, and once more the use of Opalescence Whitening toothpaste is advised with this system.

The final whitening solution available from Opalescence is **Opalescence Xtra Boost**. This treatment works rapidly, leaving you with whiter teeth before you have even left the dentist's office.

Its advance system renders the use of lasers or lights redundant. Enhanced chemical activation is used to whiten teeth without the need for heat or harmful ultraviolet rays. Basically, the product self-activates as it rests in your teeth.

Although the in-office treatment kick-starts your new brighter smile, most patients prefer to follow this with continued whitening for optimum results. Your dentist will be happy to suggest a follow-up course for home use for the days after in-office treatment, as your teeth continue to whiten and stabilise to their final, lighter shade. Once more, oral hygiene and use of Opalescence Whitening toothpaste are promoted for optimum care of your new smile.

How much does cosmetic dentistry cost?

The price of your cosmetic dentistry treatment will depend on a number of factors, such as:

- The amount of work and treatment required.
- The clinic where the treatment is carried out – some clinics that have very high standards, a reputation for excellent cosmetic work and state-of-the-art technology will charge more.
- The dentist carrying out the work and his/her level of experience and qualifications. There is a large variation in the fees charged between individual dentists: e.g., a dental crown can cost as little as £300 in some clinics and up to £2,000 per tooth in others. Specialists would generally tend to charge more than non-specialists in a particular field of cosmetic dentistry.
- The materials used – the quality and costs of the dental materials used for your treatment will affect your overall treatment cost. For example, branded dental implants such as Bicon or Nobel Biocare are much more expensive than non-branded implants imported from other countries. Dental crowns that have a metal foundation are much cheaper than all porcelain crowns.
- Aftercare and customer service – many clinics offer a guarantee with their work and the aftercare is incorporated into the price, including follow-up appointments and maintenance.

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