



Learn more about Tooth Whitening

What is involved in Tooth Whitening

There are two main types of tooth whitening: in-surgery whitening and home-based whitening. The main difference is in personal convenience.

In in-surgery whitening, the whitening gel is stronger in the former and, applied with precise, professional care, takes less overall time - a minimum of two hour-long appointments.

Whitening at home uses a less strong gel and therefore takes longer. It requires regular wearing of the whitening 'trays' for one hour at a time over two to six weeks.

There is a third type of whitening which is performed in the surgery concerned with whitening non-vital teeth, (teeth with root fillings), as they do not whiten as readily as vital teeth.

What happens in in-surgery whitening?

The appointments will be one hour long. The gums are protected and the whitening gel is placed on a number of teeth at once and the gel activated. The process is repeated a number of times with fresh whitening gel each time.

How many whitening sessions will I need?

This depends on the amount of whitening that you desire and the original shade of the teeth. If your teeth are quite dark or very yellow / grey / tetracycline stained it will take longer to bleach the teeth. Tetracycline stained teeth can take several appointments over many months to lighten the teeth.

However some teeth whiten after just one or two appointments.

If you cannot attend because of your hectic schedule, it does not matter. It will do no harm to wait two or three weeks.

What do I do if I have any sensitivity?

Sensitivity of teeth is the most common side effect of home whitening, and it can occur after in-surgery whitening also. In fact many patients do suffer from sensitive teeth. This occurs usually around the necks of the teeth where the gums have receded. If you do experience any sensitivity, we will postpone an appointment for a few days to give it time to settle down. That will usually stop the sensitivity.

Alternatively you can rub desensitizing toothpaste, e.g. Sensodyne or Tooth Mousse, into the gum margins with your finger 5 times per day for a few days.

If you are at all concerned, please call the practice.

What happens if the teeth do not whiten evenly?

If the teeth have white spots on them before whitening, these spots will appear whiter after the first one or two appointments. However the contrast between the spots and the rest of the tooth will be less and eventually they will not be noticeable. Sometimes we can do a special procedure called Microabrasion for you where the white spots can be more permanently removed. Ask about the procedure if you are concerned about this.

You may notice new white spots occurring on the teeth immediately after a whitening session. These white spots were already present on the teeth before whitening. As the teeth become lighter they become more visible. Do not worry. As the whole tooth itself becomes lighter these spots will fade.

Some teeth may appear banded with lightened whiter areas. Again these banding are originally present on the tooth. As the tooth is dark these bandings are not obvious. As the tooth becomes lighter, the lighter parts of the tooth will lighten first followed by the darker banded area. After one or two further sessions, these will not be noticeable any more.



How will my teeth feel?

Normally the teeth feel very clean after the whitening procedure. The whitening materials also have an indirect effect on the gums in helping them to heal or improving the health of the gums. This is how the technique was invented as it was first used to heal gum irritation during orthodontic treatment.

What about my smile?

Your smile will appear brighter as a bonus. It is very rare, but sometimes the teeth do not lighten at all. We may need to try a different bleaching product or a slightly higher concentration of the bleaching material.

If you have white fillings or crowns in the front teeth that match the existing shade of your teeth before your teeth are whitened, they may not match the teeth afterwards. This is because your teeth can lighten but fillings and crowns do not lighten. When the desired colour has been achieved, we can replace these fillings with a lighter shade of filling material to match the new shade of your teeth. Normally we will wait a week before changing the fillings.

How long does the whitening last? Will I have to whiten my teeth again?

Normally the new white colour of your teeth keeps quite well, The effect is dependent on what has caused the teeth to discolour in the first place. If you drink lots of coffee, red wine, cola drinks the effect may darken slightly. Some lipsticks also have a superficial darkening effect. Some patients do a top up treatment after 3-4 years. Some patients do not need to.

Does whitening harm the teeth or gums?

Safety studies have shown that whitening teeth is perfectly safe on the teeth, cheeks, gum and tissue of the mouth. Whitening the teeth is equivalent to drinking one soda drink. The whitening material has a ph which is neutral.

There have been problems with the whitening kits that are purchased over-the-counter. Although they are inexpensive, they normally contain an acid rinse, which can damage the teeth or thin down the enamel of the teeth. This acid rinse can be harmful to the teeth. There was a case where a patient purchased the kit over the counter to whiten the teeth. The teeth went darker and the patient continued over-using the treatment. This was because the acid rinse had worn the enamel away and the darker shade was the dentine that was exposed.

It is not advisable to whiten your teeth if you smoke. It is best to stop smoking for at least 3 weeks before commencing the whitening procedure. Smoking causes the teeth to darker anyway and the effects will be diminished.

The technique of Whitening Teeth is not for everybody. There are some situations where whitening teeth is contraindicated such as where the front teeth are already crowned or where there are very large fillings on the front teeth or where the teeth are already excessively worn and there is tooth surface loss. The ideal situation is where there is not much wrong with the teeth except for the colour which has become more yellow with age.

If you have any further questions or concerns, please ask.