

What to expect during your whitening treatment

Dr Harvey Grahame and Dr Anthony Charles-Kariel

Your dentist has given you a whitening kit to take home with you together with your whitening trays. It is essential that you follow the instructions given by your dentist in wearing the trays and applying the whitening agent.

How long should I wear the trays for?

This depends on the amount of lightening 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 whiten the teeth. If you are not experiencing any sensitivity you may wear the trays for at least 2 hours a day, we however suggest you sleep with the trays in your mouth. It is very important to remove all the excess material around the gums or the palate prior to sleeping with the trays.

The darker your teeth, the longer your teeth will take to get lighter. Some teeth can whiten after one week. In our experience the vast majority of treatments take between 2 and 3 weeks to complete, however tetracycline stained teeth can take 6 months or up to one year to whiten the teeth.

If you cannot wear the trays for a few days because of your hectic schedule, it does not matter. Whiten your teeth according to your own schedule. Some people put the trays in after dinner and wear them for the first hour while watching TV or doing the dishes. Then if everything is fine they replenish the trays and sleep with them in the mouth.

What do I do if I have any sensitivity?

Sensitivity of teeth is the most common side effect of home whitening. In fact many patients suffer from sensitive teeth any way. This occurs usually around the necks of the teeth where the gums have receded. If you are experiencing any sensitivity you should stop whitening your teeth for a few days. You can resume after about 3-4 days. In the unlikely event of the teeth become ultra sensitive you can place a sensitive toothpaste into the whitening trays for an hour a day. That will usually stop the sensitivity. Alternatively you can rub the sensitising toothpaste into the gum margins with your finger 5 times per day for a few days.

If you are at all concerned, please call your dentist.

What happens if the teeth do not whiten evenly?

If the teeth have white spots on them before whitening, these spots will appear whiter during the first few days, however the contrast between the spots and the rest of the tooth will be less and eventually they will not be noticeable. Sometimes the dentist can do a special procedure called Microabrasion for you where the white spots can be more permanently removed.

Ask your dentist about the procedure if you are concerned about this.

You may notice new white spots occurring on the teeth while you are undertaking the whitening treatment. 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. You may notice these white spots immediately after a whitening session or in the morning if you have been wearing the trays for the whole night.

Some teeth may appear banded with lighter/ 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 a week or so 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 first discovered as it was originally used to heal gum irritation during orthodontic treatment.

What about my smile?

If you have white fillings or crowns in the front teeth that match the existing shade of your teeth you will find that after whitening process is completed they will no longer match. We may need to replace these 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

Does Whitening harm the teeth or gums?

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

There are 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 extremely harmful to the teeth. I.e. There was a case where a patient purchased the kit over the counter, whitened 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.

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 most ideal situation is where there is . not much wrong with the teeth except for the colour which has become more yellow with the age.