

Teeth Whitening Fact Sheet



Should you be whitening your teeth?

Teeth whitening is not for everyone. Before choosing to whiten your teeth it is important to see your dentist to determine if your teeth are suitable for the treatment. Teeth whitening is not recommended for everyone because of various issues relating to gum and tooth sensitivity, the natural colour of a person's teeth and presence of fillings, crowns and veneers.

Unlike many untrained operators offering teeth whitening treatments, only dentists can assess a person's suitability for the treatment. Without a proper assessment it is not possible to rule out any permanent side effects or other risks associated with the process. If administered by untrained individuals, whitening procedures can cause discoloured teeth, heightened tooth sensitivity and gum problems.

When assessing your teeth for whitening, your dentist will:

- Ensure your mouth is healthy before whitening commences
- Diagnose the cause of any discolouration
- Discuss with you the best method to whiten your teeth
- Advise if there are factors which may influence the whitening process (e.g. antibiotic staining)
- Assess whether your fillings, crowns and veneers need replacement (as these won't change colour)

- Identify areas of gum recession
- Discuss possible tooth sensitivity and how it may be managed.

Teeth whitening should only be carried out on people who have their adult teeth, unless otherwise advised by a dentist.

Some considerations

There are a couple of easy and cost effective ways to keep your teeth looking whiter and brighter, naturally.

Chairman of the ADA's Oral Health Committee, Dr Peter Alldritt says the best way to keep a healthy white smile is to maintain good oral health.

"Practising good oral hygiene is a basic way to assist in making your teeth look whiter naturally."

"Brushing and flossing your teeth daily assists in removing surface stains on your teeth," Dr Alldritt says.

For healthier and better looking teeth, you should:

- Brush your teeth twice a day for two minutes using a fluoride toothpaste
- Floss your teeth daily
- Drink water throughout the day
- Consume a sensible diet
- Visit your dentist regularly for a professional clean

What to avoid:

- Extrinsic stains are superficial stains found on the surface of the tooth, which are caused by dental plaque, tars (in tobacco), tannins, coloured foods and frequent use of certain mouthwashes.
- Common foods and beverages that stain teeth include herbal and black tea, coffee, red wine and spicy foods like curries. Smoking cigarettes also causes unsightly stains on teeth, which can be extremely difficult to remove.
- Extrinsic stains on the tooth's surface can be removed by a dentist performing a professional scale and clean.

