

Ways to Brighten Your Teeth

Having a whiter smile has become easier to do, but with so many options now available through dentists and over-the-counter remedies, it is difficult to know which option to choose. Prepare with information on each option before making a decision.

Avoid Staining

The first step in keeping teeth looking bright is to avoid items that stain them. These include:

- Tobacco
- Coffee
- Tea (even green tea)
- Cola
- Wine
- Soy sauce
- Dark fruit juices
- Tomato sauce
- Dark berries (cranberries, blueberries)
- Curry

Some medications such as antibiotics or tetracycline may discolor teeth from the inside out. Thus, whitening methods may not be effective.

If it is not possible to avoid them, at least make an effort to brush after use so the stains do not set in.

Simple Steps to Take

Before splurging on costly whitening, take these steps to help keep teeth clean.

- **Brush at least two or three times daily.** Brush for at least two minutes to remove plaque. Brushing after every meal helps keep food or drink stains from setting in.
- **Use an electric toothbrush.** The bristles on electric toothbrushes move faster than any person can brush manually. Also, some electric toothbrushes have a built-in timer set for the length of time to properly brush. Some electric toothbrush manufacturers can even provide statistics about how well their products remove stains.
- **Choose a good mouthwash.** Many types of mouthwash contain alcohol or chlorhexidine that can discolor teeth.

- **Use a whitening toothpaste.** Many types of toothpaste now contain baking soda or other whitening agents. However, if people with thin tooth enamel, should use these with care. All toothpaste is abrasive and pastes with a whitening agent may make cause damage to the enamel. Check with a dentist before choosing this kind of toothpaste. He or she may recommend toothpaste with calcium phosphate, which has been shown to help strengthen enamel.

See the Dentist

People who feel they have extensive staining or at-home treatments that were not as successful as they wished can consult a dentist to help determine what type of treatment is appropriate for the desired results. Here are some things the dentist may offer:

- **Bleaching trays.** The dentist will make a custom-fit rubbery tray and provides instructions on how to add gels to the tray at home. The bleaching solution interacts with oxygen to brighten teeth. The downside is that it may be required to keep the tray in your mouth for an hour or more and the treatment may last a week or more.
- **Ultraviolet whitening.** This easy procedure is sometimes also called in-office bleaching or power bleaching. Teeth can usually be whitened up to 10 shades lighter in one visit. The dentist applies a peroxide whitening gel then flashes your teeth with a bright Ultraviolet (UV) light or laser to accelerate the process. While the process is quick and can usually be completed within an hour, it can be costly, ranging from \$250 to \$1000 or more per treatment. Depending on the initial shade of your teeth and eating/drinking/smoking habits, the new brightness from this process may only last a month.
- **Porcelain veneers.** Many celebrities have been known to choose porcelain veneers to whiten teeth, improve their overall smile and correct any imperfections. The process involves ultra-thin porcelain covers being bonded to each tooth. The patient can pick the shade of white desired. Veneers are a good solution for people who are genetically inclined to discolored teeth or have teeth that are discolored by medications from the inside out. The process is irreversible and costly. The price of veneers can be \$300 to \$1,500 or more per tooth. Additionally, for the veneers to be applied, the tooth enamel is removed. Thus, a person's teeth may become more sensitive to cold and hot temperatures.

Over-the-Counter Options

It is possible to purchase several different whiteners without even consulting the dentist. However, because there may be some effects such as gum irritation, tooth sensitivity or allergic reactions to the peroxide agent or the preservatives in some products, it is a good idea to call the dentist before trying anything over-the-counter.

- **Whitening strips.** Several of companies have strips that can be applied to teeth during the day. Once applied, leave the strip on for a few minutes and allow the whiteners to work. Results will usually be noticeable after a few days of use. Some companies include a color comparison chart with the product so you can measure your success. Make sure to apply the strips evenly on the teeth to keep from having a dark/light pattern.

- **Brush on gels.** Whitening gels are typically applied at night and work while a person sleeps. These products help improve moderately stained teeth. Be careful to properly place the plastic tray with the gel to get good coverage and keep from having a dark/light pattern. One drawback of these overnight gels is that they leave a chalky taste in the mouth.

All over-the-counter whiteners work with peroxide. Peroxide removes stains trapped in teeth's enamel. Because different whitener types differ by the strength of the peroxide, be careful when using these at-home products. Whiten teeth to a natural pearly white, not a glow-in-the-dark white.

Natural Ways to Whiten

There are some at-home remedies for brightening teeth. Of course, they will not be as effective as professional bleaching, but they are natural. For example, eating crunchy foods such as celery, apples and raw broccoli or carrots can help clean teeth and eliminate some of the stains.

Combining a crushed, ripe strawberry with 1/2 teaspoon baking powder and then applying on teeth for five minutes is said to help clean away some of the stains. A pasty mixture of fresh lemon juice and salt is also said to work well.

Resources

- National Dental Association: www.ndaonline.org

Here when you need us.

Call: 844-207-5465

Online: guidanceresources.com

App: GuidanceNowSM

Web ID: LivingME

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