



Professional teeth whitening treatment is one of the easiest and most cost effective ways to improve your smile. It is also something many of our patients ask us about. While there are a number of over-the-counter tooth whitening methods, only a dental professional can recommend the most effective treatment for you. For a whiter and brighter smile, contact Dr. Wilhelm by phone at 651-227-2427 or Contact Us (link to the Contact Us eform page) by email to see how easy and affordable teeth whitening can be.

You can also learn more about teeth whitening by reviewing the following answers to questions most often asked by our patients. To help you better understand teeth whitening we have included information about how tooth coloring and teeth whitening actually happens as well a quick review of several different teeth whitening products and methods (laser teeth whitening and zoom teeth whitening and others).

Why are my teeth getting darker?

Teeth get most of their color from inside the tooth from what is called dentin. The color of dentin is determined mostly by the genetic makeup of your bones and is a darker color ranging from yellowish to red-brown to gray. The color of dentin can be affected by medications taken during adolescence, when your teeth are developing and in some cases by a high amount of minerals contained in tap water.

Enamel is the outer hard layer of your teeth that is generally transparent or clear. Tiny porosities and micro-cracks in your enamel allow stains to enter the tooth, which affects the dentin and the color of your teeth. Stains on the surface of the tooth can be polished off but some will remain inside and over time will make the tooth look darker.

Does teeth whitening really work?

Yes. Teeth whitening procedures are very safe and effective. You can expect an improvement of one to two shades as measured by the same shade tabs or guides used when dentists communicate tooth color to lab technicians during restorative procedures. Beware of advertisements that say you can get up to fourteen shades whiter. These ads are referencing the entire shade spectrum, from darkest to lightest, and claiming that you will go through all of them. The fact is that if your teeth are a particular red-brown shade (actually the most common color) you will only improve to a lighter red-brown. Or if you have yellow teeth you can only expect to improve to a lighter yellow. With that said, the shade or two of improvement will be very noticeable.

How does teeth whitening work?

The actual whitening process involves chemicals called peroxides, which are hydrogen peroxide or carbamyl peroxide, which is something that changes into hydrogen peroxide. These chemicals oxidize the stains and remove them. The main difference in the various whiteners is the strength of the chemical and the rate at which it works. Over-the-counter teeth whitening kits, teeth whitening gel or teeth whitening toothpaste products are weaker and will take longer to work which means that you may have to apply them multiple times to get the result you are looking for.

How is it applied to your teeth?

Whitening agents are applied directly to your teeth or held in place by using a tray. When you purchase trays called "strips" at the store, they come in little packages similar to a bandage, which you open and fold over your teeth. These can work but have a tendency to fit poorly and not keep the whitener in place, wasting much of the whitening agent. Whitening treatments at your dentist's office are stronger and can work much faster, as your dentist will create a custom-made tray that fits your teeth precisely to keep the whitener where it will be most effective. In some cases a protective coating can be painted over your gums while a device is placed in your mouth to retract your lips and cheeks, allowing the whitening agent to be applied directly to your teeth. This is called an in-office whitening.

Are there any side effects with whitening?

Yes. The most common side effect reported is sensitivity, which is said to be either a tingling or sensation to cold. This is more common with people who have exposed roots. To deal with this issue you can cut back on the frequency of treatments, or alternate whitening material with a fluoride gel or special toothpaste, provided by your dentist. You can still whiten your teeth but it will take longer.

Keep in mind that the stronger, faster whiteners lead to increased incidents of sensitivity. A simple rule of thumb is that if you have any pre-existing sensitivity with your teeth then tell your dentist and request a lower strength whitener and expect that you may require an extra treatment. Additional treatments are usually significantly discounted from the total cost of the whitening treatment and it is important to ask your dentist about this.

How long does whitening take?

The best results are obtained by using professionally made trays and applying the treatment at home. This can be done in as little as fifteen minutes per day or at a slower one hour per day. In either case treatment is continued for two to three weeks until your product is gone. If you have not achieved your desired result you can call your dentist to get more product and repeat the process with your existing trays.

How long will my teeth whitening results last?

Since the original stains take many years to accumulate you can count on your whitening results to last for several years. You can also apply "touch ups" every year or two. You simply purchase a "touch up" tube of whitening material from your dentist and use it in your trays for a week or two.

Does laser teeth whitening or (special light) make a difference?

Research shows that the dental laser teeth whitening and Zoom light or "zoom teeth whitening" method doesn't actually enhance the end result but gives an acceptable immediate result yet dries the teeth and possibly makes the teeth seem lighter on a temporary basis. Other teeth whitening products like teeth whitening strips, gels, toothpastes and even "complete" teeth whitening kits also provide only temporary results. For long-term results, research indicates that the simplest and most effective technique is when your dentist provides you with a custom-made tray and the take-home product.

How to choose a teeth-whitening specialist?

Though there are various certified dental specialists such as a prosthodontist, who specialize in tooth replacement and creating beautiful new smiles, dentists cannot obtain specialty recognition in tooth whitening. You can benefit most by asking your dentist the questions included here or give Dr. Wilhelm a call at 651-227-2427 or Contact Us (as a link...) via email to see how easy it is to get started on your teeth whitening program.