

Brighten Your Smile

Submitted by:

Brett H. Taylor, D.D.S.



TAYLOR
... DENTISTRY ...
Pediatric & General Dentistry

Teeth whitening can be a safe and effective way to brighten your smile for the upcoming spring and summer months.

First, let's briefly review the causes of tooth discoloration and darkening. Tooth discolorations can be both on the surface (extrinsic) and inside the tooth (intrinsic). Extrinsic stains from dark colored drinks, tobacco, inadequate oral hygiene, as well as other factors can be removed with a professional cleaning at your dentist.

Intrinsic discolorations develop from natural aging of teeth, genetics, trauma, and some medications during tooth development. In addition, extrinsic factors listed previously can also be absorbed by tooth structure over time adding to the discolorations. These stains require whitening agents to improve the darkness of the tooth structure.

The primary factors that affect the speed of whitening are the strength of the whitening product, how well the gel adapts to the tooth, and the time spent on the tooth. It is important to note that all options will whiten your teeth but the difference is primarily in speed and comfort. Below are the options that are available for whitening teeth.

1. Over-the-Counter Whitening

Products purchased from your local store can whiten your teeth. However, due to the limited strength of the gel as well as the generic fit of the strips, whitening may take longer than other options and may not be as comfortable. Toothpastes, mouthrinses, and other dental products that have "whitening" on the label have limited ability to whiten. They are either not in contact with the teeth long enough to provide internal whitening or are designed only to remove extrinsic stains using mild abrasives. These products are helpful after bleaching to prevent surface staining.

2. Professional Prefilled Whitening Trays

Your dentist can offer a professional strength whitening gel and generic tray combination that cannot be purchased at a store. The material is already prefilled; all you need to do is take them out of the packaging and put them on your teeth.

3. Professional Custom-Made Trays

A custom made tray is a thin, comfortable tray that is made to fit the exact size and shape of your teeth and allows for professional whitening in the convenience of your home. It allows the use of a greater concentration of whitening gel that cannot be purchased at a store. In addition, custom trays further improve bleaching by adapting the gel to the teeth better and preventing saliva from washing the gel away. As a result, it offers more comfort and faster whitening over the previous two options. Even better, once you reach your desired whiteness you can keep your trays for future bleaching touch ups.

4. In-Office Whitening

The in-office option offers an even quicker bleaching result using professional strength gel that requires in office supervision and precautions to protect the gums. The gel is placed on the teeth and allowed to remain in place while you relax in the dental chair. The obvious advantage of the in-office bleaching is that the quick, one-time application results in a whiter smile. However, the disadvantage is the desired shade of white may not be reached. Your dentist may include custom trays for use at home as a supplement to assure you achieve your desired bright smile.

If you would like to rejuvenate and lighten your smile, whitening may be a great option. Please consult your dentist to see if whitening is right for you.

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