

How you can have a whiter, brighter smile

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If you are reading this copy of *Journal Indiana Dental Association*, you already have an above average dental IQ and concern for the well being and appearance of your teeth. And even though you may be in good oral health, you may also want to lighten the shade of your teeth.

According to a recent survey by the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry, 99.7 percent of adults believe that an attractive smile is an important social asset, and 74 percent of adults feel that an unattractive smile can hurt their chances of career advancement. So, if you are able to attain a healthy, bright smile, what are the drawbacks? The answer is that there are very few drawbacks if you and your dentist choose the appropriate strategy. Let's examine the trends behind a brighter, whiter smile.



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Types of staining on teeth

According to the American Dental Association (ADA) on Scientific Affairs, whitening, simply put, is any process that will make the tooth appear whiter. A bleaching product can remove extrinsic (surface) stain and intrinsic (deeper dentin) stain by using hydrogen peroxide or carbamide peroxide. Non-bleaching whitening agents work by removing the extrinsic surface stains only. So the goal is to free the tooth of this stain

present on the outside or inside of the tooth. This seems like an easy process, so let's examine the ways to accomplish this.

Whitening procedures

Whitening toothpastes—Whitening toothpastes in the ADA Seal of Acceptance program contain polishing or chemical agents to remove surface stain in order to whiten teeth. The positives for whitening toothpastes are that they are inexpensive, and those in the ADA Seal of Acceptance program do contain fluoride that help strengthen tooth structure. The negative with whitening toothpastes are that they may not whiten teeth enough.

Over-the-counter home use tooth whitening bleaches—Over-the-counter products generally contain 10 percent carbamide peroxide to bleach the teeth. These are applied by the patient at home, and then worn for a short period of time. They too have the advantage of being relatively inexpensive, and the results are generally better than whitening toothpastes. They have the drawback of being hard to place and the carbamide peroxide can cause a very mild gum irritation. These products have been a very good alternative for patients who are beginning to whiten their teeth.

Dentist-dispensed trays with bleaching solution for home use—A properly fitting whitening tray made by your dentist will always fit better and allow for less gum irritation than over-the-

counter products. The bleaching solution of carbamide peroxide is a higher concentration, and the patient is able to wear the trays for a longer period of time due to the exact fit of the trays. Trays are worn for 14 to 21 days, and they can be worn as needed after the initial whitening to boost the appearance of the teeth. Tooth sensitivity may occur during the early stages of treatment, and the professionally made trays are slightly more expensive. The whitening results are more dramatic than with toothpaste or whitening strips.

Professionally applied bleach whiteners in office—

This category of bleaching refers to the procedures that utilize a light or laser to accelerate or activate the whitening process. The bleaching solution is 15 to 35 percent hydrogen peroxide, and the procedure is usually completed in 60 to 90 minutes in the dental office. The benefit of this procedure is that the whitening is completed in one session, and the results are dramatic. The cost is higher than the other procedures, and sensitivity may be an initial concern. Sensitivity generally decreases in the first 24 hours.

Whitening kiosks—Tooth whitening has become an attractive business venture for many outside the dental profession. It's not unusual to see tooth whitening services offered by cosmetologists, at the local mall, even at the county fair. In most cases, these whitening services are unregulated and the individuals providing treatment are unlicensed and have no formal dental training. In some states, tooth whitening has been deemed the unlicensed practice of dentistry, but that is not yet the case in Indiana. While these services often claim they offer the same products you receive at the dentist, they don't offer the benefit of a dental examination before you begin treatment and there is no consistency on infection control procedures or the strength of the whitening agents that are used from one location to another. The IDA recommends you receive a dental examination and consult with your dentist before considering the use of any bleaching agent.

Choose the whitening procedure that's best for you

Talk to your IDA member dentist about whitening your teeth. He or she will help you make the correct decision for your overall oral health. There may be other underlying conditions that may keep your teeth from whitening, such as wearing, cracks, fractures, or deep staining due to early use of antibiotics like tetracycline. No one can help you with the whitening process more than your dentist. Trust us to accurately diagnose and recommend the correct whitening program for you.

Want to whiten your smile? Choose a procedure wisely