



## 10 things you wanted to know about tooth whitening

1. Teeth naturally darken with age. This is because they accumulate stain on the outside (extrinsic stain) and also absorb materials that stain on the inside (intrinsic). This is made worse by lifestyle such as smoking and eating and drinking of stain causing materials such as coffee, tea and red wine. In addition the enamel wears away with time exposing the dentine which is naturally darker.
2. Whiter teeth make you look younger. Whiter teeth make the owner not only feel great but in a recent survey by Oral-B they make the person look 13 years younger. Healthier, younger looking teeth give the person a great boost in confidence.
3. How long does it last? Most whitened teeth stay lighter up to 3 years. However this is dependant on lifestyle and so we encourage our patients to perform maintenance whitening. This generally involves wearing the at-home trays one night every 1-2 months.
4. Tooth whitening does not damage the teeth. The whitening material is hydrogen peroxide. This is an oxidising agent that breaks down the stain molecules without removing or damaging the tooth structure.
5. Are there any side effects? Tooth whitening can cause teeth to become sensitive. This is generally mild in most people and disappears after the treatment stops.
6. Lasers are just a gimmick. It is advertised that the use of lasers or special lights can accelerate the whitening procedure. Scientific research though has found that these energy sources do very little. Unfortunately in some cases they have been shown to do harm as prolonged exposure to these energies can cause temperature rises in the teeth which is harmful.
7. At home or in the surgery? There are 2 ways to whiten the teeth. The at-home system uses a thin mouth-guard that is generally worn through the night and keeps the whitening gel against the teeth. In-surgery whitening uses greater strength peroxide solutions painted directly onto the teeth. As the concentration is higher so is the speed of whitening. The best results use a combination of the two techniques.
8. Whitening gels only lighten the colour of teeth. Therefore fillings, crowns and veneers are unaffected and if they are present will stand out against the whitened teeth. As such they will need to be replaced after the teeth are whitened.
9. Which teeth whiten the best? As a general rule yellowish teeth whiten the best, brownish teeth less well and greyish teeth may not whiten at all. Some intrinsic stains are very hard to shift. A good example is teeth that have blue/grey staining due to the antibiotic tetracycline. These teeth can take a long time to whiten (perhaps up to 6 months) and some may not change much at all.
10. Whitening toothpastes do not whiten teeth. Toothpastes work using abrasive agents to remove extrinsic staining and as such can make the teeth look better. However they do not remove the intrinsic stains that cause the greatest amount of tooth discolouration.