

Teeth Whitening

Teeth Whitening: Customize Your Bright, White Smile

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Teeth whitening is the most commonly requested cosmetic dentistry procedure. Teeth whitening falls into the cosmetic dentistry category because it is designed to enhance your appearance by reducing tooth discoloration and staining to elicit a brighter, whiter smile.

You may feel that your teeth are too discolored to ever be white again, but cosmetic dentists are achieving amazing results with the newest whitening techniques.

The Prevalence of Tooth Discoloration

Tooth discoloration and staining is a relatively common problem. Teeth are porous and are therefore not stain resistant. Red wine, soda, coffee, and tea, among other food and drink, contribute to the discoloration of teeth over time. Medications such as the antibiotic tetracycline may cause significant staining, resulting in yellow, grayish teeth. Smokers's teeth can become permanently stained if the discoloration is not treated in a timely manner.

Tooth brushing alone can't brighten teeth dulled by years of exposure to such discoloring agents. In fact, people with dull teeth sometimes over-brush in an attempt to eliminate stains, and this can harm the enamel.

Teeth Whitening Considerations

More often than not, teeth whitening works adequately. Teeth whitening procedures performed by your dentist may potentially whiten your teeth up to 14 shades, correcting serious discoloration issues.

Find a Local Cosmetic Dentist

Choose your location...

Victoria

Beverly Hills

Los Angeles

Monterey

Sacramento

San Diego

San Jose/South Bay

Fairfield County

Atlanta

Chicago

Detroit

Minneapolis

Central New Jersey

Southern New Jersey

Long Island

Manhattan

Staten Island

Cincinnati

London

Toronto

Bellevue

Occasionally tooth discoloration is so severe that whitening alone cannot fully treat the problem. Such situations may require a combination of whitening and the placement of custom porcelain veneers on specific discolored teeth. You may opt for veneer treatment alone rather than a teeth whitening regimen. Consult your dentist to determine the best course of action for your unique oral concerns.

Your dentist will also advise you to avoid food and drink that could stain your teeth for about a week, as well as to refrain from smoking.

The Teeth Whitening Procedure: In-Office vs. At-Home

Teeth whitening can be performed either in-office by your dentist or at home by you. While in-office whitening is considered to be much quicker and more effective, many appreciate at-home whitening for its ease of use and low cost. How exactly do the two options differ?

In-Office Whitening

The advantage of having your teeth whitened in the dental office is that this approach is safe, fast, and most effective.

Typically, your teeth can be whitened 8 - 10 shades within 45 minutes, dramatically improving your appearance in the shortest possible time. Shade charts are used during the consultation stage of treatment to customize the perfect shade of white for your teeth. In-office whitening is unique in this respect, as your dentist has more control over achieving your specific teeth whitening goals.

During your teeth whitening procedure, you are made comfortable while your teeth are prepared. Your dentist uses a tissue barrier (gel or rubber guard) to protect the lips and gums from a whitening gel that is applied to the teeth.

The application of the whitening gel occurs in three sessions over the course of the visit. A special lamp is used to activate the whitening gel and speed up the whitening process. Once the gel is activated, it remains on the teeth for 15 minutes until the next application.

Learn more about commonly used in-office whitening agents.

At-Home Teeth Whitening

Although many people opt for the "once-and-done" approach to teeth whitening associated with in-office treatment, some people prefer the at-home method. The most effective at-home whitening system is a prescription-strength gel kit your dentist provides. Most kits contain mouth trays that you fill with the whitening gel and place over your teeth for up to four hours.

While the dentist-prescribed at-home whitening system is more effective than other at-home options, you may opt for a less expensive over-the-counter teeth whitening kit. These kits may contain whitening gel and application trays, or whitening strips that you place on the surface of your teeth.

At-home teeth whitening requires several hours of application over a 5 - 14 day period, and the results are typically not as satisfactory as those achieved with an in-office approach.

Whitening has become popular to the point that many toothpastes and mouthwashes are now infused with whitening agents. Toothpaste whitening is an inexpensive and relatively ineffective whitening option.

Your dentist can help you determine which brand of whitening may best serve your esthetic goals.

Teeth Whitening Costs

The overall cost of teeth whitening depends on many factors, some of which include:

- The dentist performing the procedure.

- The locale where the procedure is performed.
- The whitening modality you select.
- Your dental insurance coverage (cosmetic dentistry is typically not covered by insurance).

On average, teeth whitening may cost approximately \$450 with the results lasting up to six months or more.

Maintaining Your Whiter Smile

In order to maximize the longevity of your whitening treatment, it is important to maintain excellent oral hygiene (brush and floss after every meal) and steer clear of some of the more common causes of discoloration (coffee, tea, red wine, etc.). To help avoid future staining, dentists often suggest using a straw, even with coffee and tea. Smokers wishing to undergo whitening treatment are advised to stop smoking in order to prevent the staining it causes. Discuss such considerations with your dentist during your initial whitening consultation.