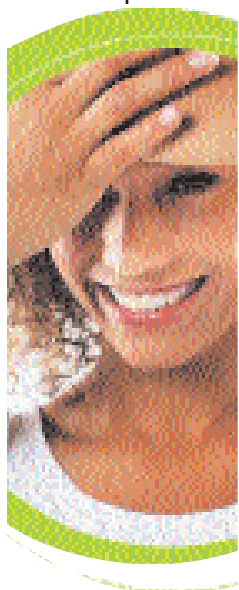




by Dr. Marcus S. Tappan

BRIGHTER

Frequently asked questions



There are many ways to improve the way you look. One of the easiest places to start is whitening your teeth. Brighter, whiter teeth are a look that we all desire. Now that look is very easy to achieve.

People with bright, healthy looking teeth are perceived as being younger, more vibrant and even more intelligent, whereas people with dark, stained and discolored teeth are passed over more often for jobs and promotions. The latter also tend to look older than they really are and often have less self-confidence.

With today's technologies and innovations in bleaching teeth, having a bright, white and beautiful smile is much easier than you may think.

Here are a few frequently asked questions about the bleaching process:

1. How are teeth whitened?

A chemical gel is used to lighten the discoloration of the tooth enamel. The gel is made of a peroxide solution. Once applied to the teeth, the solution breaks down, reacts with stains and whitens them. This process makes the overall tooth color brighter and whiter than its natural color.



Aging before



Genetic before



Aging after



Genetic after

2. How do teeth become discolored?

Teeth can become discolored over time due to age or drinking excessive amounts of coffee, tea or artificially colored beverages such as sodas. Red wine and nicotine can also discolor your teeth as can excessive fluoride and old silver fillings.

In many cases, genetics can play a role in discoloration of teeth. Some people are born with naturally

stained or dark teeth. Overuse of the antibiotic tetracycline can also be considered a factor. Tetracycline staining is common in young children.

3. How can I bleach my teeth?

Bleaching can be performed in the dental office or you can bleach your teeth at home. If you choose to bleach in the dental office, the bleaching gel is applied to your teeth and then a

WHITER TEETH

laser beam, or high intensity light, is applied to activate the gel. The gel absorbs the energy from the light and penetrates the tooth enamel to whiten the teeth.

If you choose to bleach at home, there is a take-home whitening kit, which includes two custom-made acrylic trays that contain the bleach and fit over the upper and lower teeth.

Over-the-counter bleaching kits can also be purchased from your local pharmacy. Some of these kits come with trays and some come with plastic, gel-coated strips, that are applied to the upper and lower teeth. These kits are much less effective than the office or custom take-home kit. The best results are achieved through a combination of laser bleaching followed by the custom tray take-home kit.

4. How long does the bleaching process take?

The laser treatment, which is conducted in the dental office, takes approximately one to two hours. The home care, custom-tray bleaching process takes two office visits to fit your custom trays and instruct you on the use of the products. Once the process is started, the trays must be worn for two to four hours per day for a minimum of two weeks. It may even take longer to achieve the desired results.

5. Is the gel safe and can it damage my teeth?

If you are a candidate for whitening (see number 8), it is a gentle and safe procedure when supervised by your dentist. It does not affect the enamel, tooth structure, bonding or restorations. The peroxide solution simply breaks up the deposits lodged in your tooth structure and then carries them away.

6. Is there any discomfort?

There can be a little discomfort during both the in-office and take-home treatments. Fewer than 10 percent of patients feel an increased sensitivity to hot and cold or pressure during the whitening process. The sensitivity usually ends a day or two after the treatment is completed.

7. Does the whitening last forever?

Non-smokers and those who drink little or no coffee, tea or soda see little or no change in their tooth color for up to three years after treatment. Your own long-term results will depend on your dental care habits and the specific foods you eat. Based on those variables, some patients may require a touch-up every year or so.

8. Is tooth whitening for everyone or are there some people who should avoid the process?

Nearly anyone can be a candidate for bleaching. However, before you begin, you must have a complete oral examination and evaluation. The bleaching is not recommended for people with decayed teeth, exposed roots, untreated periodontal disease, and severe health problems or jaw problems. It is also not recommended for pregnant or nursing women, or children under the age of 12.

9. I have crowns and bridges on some of my teeth. Will bleaching affect them?

No. The permanent restorations in your mouth are usually made from porcelain or porcelain-like materials and will not change in color. Eventually you may want to replace them to match the newly whitened teeth.

Marcus S. Tappan, DDS, has been improving smiles for over 17 years. A graduate of Howard University School of Dentistry and a Major in the Army Dental Corps for 7 years, he now has a thriving practice located in Silver Spring, Maryland. Dr. Tappan can be reached at (301) 565-8212 or via Internet at www.drappan.com.