



AUSTRALIAN DENTAL  
ASSOCIATION

## Teeth Whitening

# Getting the best result for your smile

Do you avoid smiling because you are embarrassed about the colour of your teeth? If yellowing or stains on your teeth are affecting your confidence, a whitening treatment may be worth considering. There are a range of safe treatment options available from your dentist, but there are some facts you need to know before you undertake treatment.

### Discoloured Teeth

Firstly don't worry, your dentist can help. Remember that teeth naturally begin to turn yellower and darker as we get older. The things we do in our everyday lives, like consuming certain foods and beverages contribute to the discolouration of our teeth. Tea, coffee, and red wine are often blamed as the main culprits, but in reality even a healthy diet will result in some staining. The good news is that some of the staining caused by diet is 'external', and can be removed by your dentist. Book an appointment for an examination and a clean.

However, sometimes teeth discolouration requires more complicated treatment from your dentist. If you have dental trauma from an accident, you have naturally 'dark' teeth, or you have teeth that came through already discoloured, this type of staining is 'internal' and conventional polishing techniques won't work for you. However don't despair, there are a number of options available so book an appointment as your dentist can still help.

Crowns, veneers, fillings, and dentures will not whiten.

### Whitening Options

1. At home whitening 'trays': This involves your dentist taking an 'impression' of your teeth and making custom fitted trays. You will then take the trays and bleaching gel home and apply as directed by your dentist. Make sure you follow their instructions as not doing so can cause damage to your teeth and gums.

*Putting more bleach in than recommended does not make your teeth whiter, it just increases the risk you will burn your gums!*

2. Professional whitening by your dentist: Dentists are allowed to use a higher concentration of bleach than you are at home, and often offer 'in-chair' whitening at the dental practice. This involves painting your teeth with stronger bleach and activating it using an ultra-violet light or a laser, often with immediate results. Follow up whitening using trays at home is often recommended.

*Sometimes your dentist will need to replace old and stained fillings that will not change colour with the bleaching process.*

### What are the risks?

Every mouth is unique, so your dentist is the best person to assess the possible risks or side-effects associated with bleaching your teeth. Whitening, when handled by a dental professional, poses very little risk - some people may have sensitivity to hot and cold foods for a 48 hour period after a bleaching procedure, or experience 'zingers' which might feel like a mini-electric shock within a tooth. This is completely normal but if you are concerned or in severe pain you should contact your dentist straight away. Often there are products your dentist can recommend to help decrease this sensitivity.

Whitening teeth without proper instruction by a dentist can be dangerous and could result in permanent damage to your teeth and gums. If administered incorrectly, you are at risk of chemical burns to your gums which cause pain, blistering, and discolouration. Even if you do not cause injury, without proper instruction you are at risk of uneven and often disappointing results.

**Avoid beauticians, hairdressers, and shopping centres who are NOT qualified to whiten your teeth.**

### Alternative Approaches to Whiter Teeth

The first stop on the road to whiter teeth should always be your dentist. A regular professional dental clean will keep the external stains to a minimum, and if you have old fillings or crowns, your dentist may recommend replacements or veneers to brighten your smile. If you've been told your teeth are not suitable for bleaching, remember there's more than one way to brighten a tooth! Regular flossing and brushing reduces stains and keeps teeth at optimum health. Depending on your circumstances, your dentist may suggest including whitening toothpaste in your daily regime.

*"The best way to have white teeth and keep them white is great oral hygiene that includes a sensible diet, drinking plenty of water, flossing and brushing correctly, and regular check-ups at your dentist."*

For more information on oral health visit [ada.org.au](http://ada.org.au)

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