

Teeth Whitening

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Take home tray vs in-chair

You have been given this information sheet because you have expressed an interest in whitening your teeth.

The information in this sheet will help you to be able to give informed consent to the procedure should you decide to proceed. The information in this sheet is of a general nature and your dentist will discuss in detail your specific clinical situation. It is expected you will ask questions about anything you don't understand or any concerns you may have.

Broadly speaking there are two ways to whiten your teeth through bleaching.

The most predictable and controllable method is to have some custom fitted lightweight bleaching trays made and to wear these trays overnight with a carbamide peroxide bleaching agent inside.

This method has been studied extensively and has been shown to produce very predictable results. Wearing overnight keeps the bleaching agent in contact with the teeth for 6-8 hours (a long time) and hence whitening can be relatively rapid.

The whitening effect on teeth is basically a function of the strength of the bleach used and the time the bleach is in contact with the tooth. However, if the bleach used is too strong, the teeth may become uncomfortably sensitive so a balance is required.

Hence, for overnight whitening, a medium strength slow release bleaching agent such as 16% carbamide peroxide is used. This produces a steady bleaching effect over a longer period and is generally less likely to produce any sensitivity side-effects.

If you don't like the idea of wearing trays overnight or you have other complicating issues such as breathing or grinding problems then another option for tray bleaching is daytime use. In this scenario the whitening agent used is a more aggressive, short-acting bleaching agent such as 7.5% hydrogen peroxide. This acts very quickly on the teeth but also is only effective for a shorter time. Hence this is used either twice a day for 30mins or once a day for 45mins.

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Even though the bleach is stronger it is in contact with the teeth for a lot less time than in the overnight scenario so it may take a little longer time to achieve the same result as overnight bleaching.

The second way to whiten the teeth with bleaching is with the in-chair method.

In this scenario you attend the surgery for a single one hour appointment and a very strong bleaching agent (approx 37% hydrogen peroxide) is placed on the teeth 3 or 4 times for about 8 mins at a time.

Because of the strength of the bleach it is necessary to minimize any contact with the soft-tissues in the mouth so your dentist needs to place the bleach in a very controlled manner with suitable precautions to protect the soft-tissues.

Here, the same principles apply. The bleach is very strong but the time of contact is small. There is more chance of having sensitivity either during or after the whitening due to the high concentration, though this is reversible (usually lasting no more than 12 hours).

As a rule-of-thumb, an in-chair bleaching session is equivalent to approximately two weeks of tray bleaching. Depending on how well your teeth respond to the whitening treatment (see the frequently-asked-questions sheet) that may be an acceptable result for you. If not you may want to consider following up with tray bleaching as well.

In summary, tray bleaching is slower but more predictable and gives you more control (you can decide on your shade by just stopping when happy). In-chair bleaching is much more convenient and may get you your desired result in one visit (or save yourself about two weeks of tray bleaching) but is more expensive.

