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Tooth Whitening or Bleaching

Why do teeth change color?

Over time, your teeth can go from white to *not-so-bright* for several reasons.

- **Age**
 - ✓ Over time the inner layer of the tooth can darken, crack, and trap stain.
- **Food and Drink**
 - ✓ Berries, coffee, tea, cola drinks, and red wine are some examples of what can stain teeth.
- **Trauma**
 - ✓ Injury from a fall or impact can cause discoloration.
- **Medications**
 - ✓ Some medications and chemotherapy treatments may have side effects that discolor teeth.
- **Tobacco Use**
 - ✓ The main ingredients in tobacco, tar, and nicotine turn into a yellowish surface-staining substance.
- **Broken, leaking filling of untreated dental caries**
 - ✓ Stain can trap within teeth in a broken filling or dental cavity. This is corrected by a dentist placing or replacing a dental filling matching the color with the teeth around it.

How does teeth whitening or bleaching work?

- Teeth whitening or bleaching from the outside of the tooth is a straightforward process.
 - ✓ Some products remove surface stains.
 - ✓ Some products bleach surface stains and stains inside the tooth.
 - ✓ For some types of staining, a dentist will have to perform the bleaching from inside the tooth.

Does whitening or bleaching work on all teeth?

- No, so talk to your dentist before starting. Your dentist can help you decide the best options and what result you can expect.
- In general, exposed root surfaces because of receded gums will not brighten or whiten with a bleaching procedure.
- Patients who have tooth-colored restorations, including crowns or implants, should be aware only natural teeth are affected by the bleaching agent.

What are some whitening or bleaching options?

- **Toothpaste**

- ✓ Whitening pastes that have the American Dental Association (ADA) Seal of Acceptance for surface stain removal, indicating they are both safe and effective when used as directed.
- **In-Office Whitening or Bleaching**
 - ✓ Chairside bleaching requiring only one visit.
- **At-Home Whitening or Bleaching from your Dentist**
 - ✓ Dentist-supplied bleaching solutions in custom-made trays are made for at-home use; several treatments are necessary.
- **Over-the-Counter Whitening or Bleaching Products**
 - ✓ Over the counter bleaching products are weaker and typically not as effective.

Are there any side effects from teeth whitening or bleaching?

- Yes, sometimes tooth sensitivity or irritation of gums can occur, and usually go away after you stop the tooth whitening process.
- Be sure to get a check-up to ensure that you do not have active dental disease, broken fillings, or other underlying conditions before starting at-home tooth whitening.
- Using bleaching agents on teeth with dental caries or leaky fillings will not remove dark color. Putting bleaching materials on the tooth may result in the tooth decay process to continue, resulting in more extensive treatment.
 - ✓ If possible, it is best to wait until permanent teeth have erupted.
 - ✓ Always follow directions for any option your dentist recommends.

Resources

American Dental Association

<https://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/w/whitening>

American Dental Association – Mouth Healthy

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