



TOOTH WHITENING INFORMATION GROUP

Campaign for safe tooth whitening

www.safetoothwhitening.org



A BUYER'S GUIDE TO TOOTH WHITENING

What is tooth whitening?

Professional tooth whitening is an effective way of lightening the natural colour of your teeth without removing any of your tooth's surface.

There are a number of reasons why you might get your teeth whitened. Everyone is different; and just as our hair and skin colour vary, so do our teeth. Very few people have brilliant-white teeth.

There are two types of tooth whitening: whitening at the dentist's surgery or at-home whitening. Your dentist will be able to discuss with you which type would be best to help you get the result you want.

Results will vary from person to person depending on the original colour of your teeth and your general lifestyle. You can expect tooth whitening carried out by a dental professional to last for around 3 years before you need top-up treatment.

What are the rules and regulations?

It's fairly simple – the law says that tooth whitening is a 'dental procedure' that should only be offered and carried out by qualified dental professionals. The European Directive on this has been confirmed by the High Court. This means that anybody carrying out tooth whitening other than a qualified dental professional is doing it illegally.

There is also a legal age limit for tooth whitening, which means you have to be at least 18 years old to have it done.

Also, the law says that tooth-whitening products containing or releasing more than 0.1 per cent hydrogen peroxide can now only be sold to a registered dental professional offering the treatment in their practice. (And these products must not contain or release more than 6 per cent hydrogen peroxide.)

This means that tooth-whitening products or kits you buy over the counter or on the internet can legally only contain or release up to 0.1 per cent hydrogen peroxide. And this concentration is too low to have any noticeable effect on the colour of your teeth.

Question time

We expect you will have some questions about tooth whitening, so we've answered a few frequently asked questions to put your mind at ease.

Q. Will it hurt?

A. Some people may find their teeth become more sensitive. Others may have slight white patches on the gum line, but these will disappear within a few days of treatment. Extreme sensitivity or burning of the gums is not normal. If you are in pain, go back to your dentist straight away.

Q. How long will the whitening effect last?

A. If you avoid food and drink that may stain your teeth – red wine, curries, tea and coffee – it can last for up to three years.

Q. What if I have fillings, veneers, crowns or dentures?

A. Tooth whitening will not work on any 'false' teeth such as veneers, crowns or dentures, nor will it whiten fillings. These may need to be replaced after tooth whitening to match the new colour of your teeth.

Q. Who should I contact if I have problems after the treatment? What if I am not happy with the treatment?

A. Your dentist should have a written complaint procedure for you to follow if you are not happy with any aspect of your treatment.

Q. What kind of insurance will my dentist have?

A. All dentists will have indemnity insurance which covers all the treatments they give. Because it is illegal for anyone other than a dentist to carry out tooth whitening, only a dentist would be able to take out insurance to cover this. So people offering tooth whitening illegally won't be insured.

Some friendly advice...

Before you go and give your teeth a whiter future, here are a few things you should consider...

- If you are not sure that the treatment you are being offered is legal, do not go ahead with it and ask your dentist for advice
- A qualified and registered dental professional will have a 'GDC number' from the General Dental Council. You can check this at www.gdc-uk.org. If you want to check that someone is legally allowed to carry out the treatment, go to this website first
- If the treatment says 'peroxide free', it still may not be safe or legal. Check that it does not use sodium perborate or chlorine dioxide – these can be harmful
- You cannot get whitening treatments on the NHS. Private charges will vary from practice to practice and region to region, so shop around for the best deal. If a friend has had their teeth whitened by a dental professional, talk to them too
- Although they do not affect the natural colour of your teeth, whitening toothpastes may be effective at removing staining, helping to restore the natural colour of your teeth

If you have any concerns about a product or someone you think is carrying out illegal tooth whitening, please go to www.safetoothwhitening.org and let the Tooth Whitening Information Group know.