

BRIGHTEN YOUR SMILE

By Norman J. Pomerance, D.D.S.

One of the most popular dental cosmetic procedures today is tooth whitening. The options for tooth whitening are many including strips, pastes and gels bought “over-the-counter” or dentist supervised methods. Most types of whitening products are based on hydrogen peroxide or carbamide peroxide, both safe to enamel when used properly. Most products are effective but the safest method would be one prescribed by your dentist after a thorough examination of your teeth and gums in order to evaluate the condition of your mouth. The dentist would look for evidence of decay, root exposure, gum disease, defective fillings or other problems which could impact the method chosen.

Whitening toothpastes or mouth rinses and brush-on pastes or gels can only remove accumulated stains on the outside of the enamel and may whiten teeth one shade at best. In order to remove the more deep seated stains from eating or drinking foods that have darkened teeth over a period of time, a method must be employed that delivers a whitening gel to the enamel over a period of time. Whitening strips can be effective but they must be used properly everyday to elicit the desired result. Most strips are placed over the teeth twice a day for at least one week or longer. Depending upon eating and drinking habits, this treatment must be repeated every six months to keep the resulting shade from fading.

Dentist supervised whitening is the most effective method of securing a whiter smile. This includes in office treatment and/or a take home method that entails the construction of small trays that fit over the teeth perfectly which delivers the whitening gel just to the enamel of the teeth and does not cover the gums. The trays are very easy to use and can be worn during the day for a couple of hours or while sleeping. This treatment usually takes two weeks and can often whiten teeth nine shades or more depending on the beginning color. Touch-ups are also very easy to do since the trays are reusable. Ask your dentist which method of whitening would be best for you.