



# Teeth Whitening

## INFORMATION SHEET

### Teeth whitening

There are several reasons why live teeth get stained (discoloured). Firstly, teeth may be covered with an accumulation of dental plaque and tartar. Staining can be caused by frequent consumption of coffee, tea and red wine, or tobacco use. Basic tooth treatment (cleaning and polishing) is enough to get rid of these stains, considered to be superficial.

However, sometimes staining affects the enamel and dentin of the teeth. Natural ageing, diet, tobacco use, certain medications in the tetracycline family (antibiotics), too much fluoride at a young age and cavities can also cause staining inside the tooth. Teeth whitening is entirely appropriate for getting rid of staining.

### What is teeth whitening?

Teeth whitening is a treatment where a peroxide-based gel is applied to the teeth to remove unwanted staining. However, it is important to note that some staining reacts better to whitening than others, which is why you need to have a dental exam and diagnosis from a dentist.



### What are the different tooth whitening methods?

- Teeth whitening at home using properly fitted trays.
- Teeth whitening at the dentist's office.
- Use of over-the-counter whitening products.

You can discuss with your dentist the various ways of whitening your teeth and the effectiveness, risks, benefits and costs of each technique. The technique described in this sheet is teeth whitening at home under a dentist's supervision.

### What steps are involved in at-home teeth whitening?

First, your dentist has to clean your teeth and carry out a full exam to make sure you do not have any cavities or defective restorations. Then your dentist determines the cause of your teeth staining; this step is very important because the duration and cost of whitening treatment varies with the type and intensity of the staining. Next, your dentist takes an impression of your teeth, so a custom plastic tray can be made for your teeth. You will put a small amount of peroxide-based gel in the tray. Then you just need to wear the tray during the day or at night, depending on your preference and schedule. Average duration of treatment is two to six weeks. However, teeth stained with nicotine or medications such as tetracycline may require treatment for two to six months.

### How long do teeth stay white after a treatment?

This can vary greatly from one patient to another and depends on lifestyle habits. For most people, the effect lasts for one to three years. For some, their teeth will stay white for several years without requiring additional whitening treatment.

## What are the risks of at-home teeth whitening?

Potential side effects of at-home teeth whitening include the following:

- **Tooth hypersensitivity.** Some patients develop tooth sensitivity during treatment. The sensitivity is usually temporary and goes away when treatment is stopped. If sensitivity to cold, heat, or breathing occurs during treatment, you should stop the treatment and talk to your dentist.
- **Gum irritation.** This may be due to an improperly fitted tray with rough edges that are irritating your gums or nearby soft tissue (cheeks, mucous membranes). It is also possible that you put too much gel in the tray; this causes the product to overflow and irritate your gums, causing redness or small ulcers. In either situation, you should stop treatment right away and talk to your dentist.
- **Throat irritation.** If you use too much gel, this may cause the product to overflow when you insert the tray. Instead of spitting excess product out in the sink, if you accidentally swallow it, you may experience throat irritation. The irritation is short lasting, as long as you are careful to spit out any excess gel.
- **Joint discomfort.** You may experience discomfort in the jaw joint. This is likely to occur when wearing the plastic tray during your treatment, since the thickness of the mouthpiece prevents you from closing your teeth as you usually do. Talk to your dentist if you have any concerns.

## Contraindications to whitening treatment

- Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding.
- People wearing braces.

Please note that, for patients whose immune system has been weakened by serious illness, a joint decision with the dentist is vital to determine whether tooth whitening should be initiated or postponed. For people with chronic heartburn or major temporomandibular joint (TMJ) problems, the dentist will indicate

treatment frequency and duration, and the most appropriate time of day to use the mouthpiece. People who grind their teeth should wear the tray during the day to prevent it from wearing out early.

## Recommendations for use

- Brush teeth well and floss before the treatment.
- Do not smoke when using the whitening product.
- Do not eat or drink during the whitening treatment.
- Keep the whitening product away from heat.
- Place unused syringes in the fridge.
- Start treatment on either your top or bottom teeth using one tray. At the follow-up visit, if there are no problems, the dentist will tell you whether you can continue and use both trays at the same time.

It is important that teeth whitening is done under your dentist's supervision. By performing a dental exam and asking general/medical questions, the dentist can diagnose the cause of the staining and estimate treatment duration, total cost and chances of success. The result is difficult to predict, and there are no guarantees. However, most patients notice improvement one to four weeks after starting treatment.

I gave this information sheet to patient (name): \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Dentist's signature: \_\_\_\_\_