

## ACHIEVING A WHITER SMILE

# Tackling stained teeth



Here we explain what affects the colour of teeth and the options available for a brighter, whiter smile.

## What causes tooth staining?

Tooth staining can be divided into two types: extrinsic and intrinsic. Extrinsic staining refers to deposits on the surface of the tooth, while intrinsic staining is a result of pigmentation within the enamel or dentine inside the tooth.

Extrinsic staining is caused by:

- well-known agents such as coffee, tea, red wine, some fruit juice and tobacco
- the stain results from either coloured material binding to the tooth surface and darkening with time, or from a chemical reaction occurring in the plaque to form coloured deposits.

Extrinsic stain can be kept at bay by using a whitening toothpaste, but if left the stains can usually be removed by a dental professional.

Intrinsic staining can be divided into two types: pre- and post-eruptive staining and there are different causes.

- Pre-eruptive staining (or whilst the tooth is yet to emerge fully from the gum line) occurs while the tooth is still developing. The most common cause is excessive fluoride intake. Taking certain medications such as the antibiotic tetracycline can also cause discolouration.
- Post-eruptive staining occurs once the tooth is fully developed. It may be caused by trauma to the tooth, resulting in bleeding in the dental pulp and the entry of blood into the dentine making the tooth darker.

**Depending on the type and degree of discolouration, there are many different approaches you can take to tackle stained teeth.**

## Did you know?

- 1 The natural colour of teeth is predetermined by the translucency of the enamel and the thickness of the underlying yellowish dentine.
- 2 Milk (baby, primary or deciduous) teeth appear whiter because the dentine is thinner, while adult (permanent) teeth appear more yellow as enamel becomes thinner from daily wear and tear.
- 3 Very few people have naturally white teeth – but it is possible visibly to whiten teeth with 'cosmetic' bleaching treatments.
- 4 Teeth tend to become darker and more discoloured as we age and a 'dead' tooth can go very dark or even black.
- 5 Bleaching does not produce the same results on all types of teeth discolouration and tooth-coloured fillings, crowns, bridges and veneers will not lighten when your teeth are bleached.

## ACHIEVING A WHITER SMILE – tackling stained teeth

### Whitening toothpastes

Whitening toothpastes work by removing surface stains to reveal the natural appearance of the underlying enamel. They are available as gels and pastes and contain different active ingredients that help remove stains and can even prevent further stain build-up in between dental visits.

### Scaling and polishing

Scaling and polishing are the processes of getting your teeth cleaned by your dentist or dental hygienist. While scaling uses ultrasonic and hand instruments to remove hard tartar, polishing uses prophylaxis paste to remove stains such as those from coffee, tea, cigarettes or red wine.

### Whitening treatments (bleaching)

Tooth whitening treatments have become extremely popular over the last few years. It is non-surgical and non-invasive and it is an effective way to improve your appearance. There are different types of whitening treatment, from products you can use at home to professional treatments undertaken by your dental practitioner who will be able to give advice on what is suitable for you.

#### Bleaching

This involves the application of a whitening product held in a specially made tray that fits around your teeth. Whether you opt for a home treatment or one supervised by your dentist (where the tray is moulded to fit your mouth), you will have to apply the product each day for the time period recommended. Some products can be applied for up to 30 minutes to an hour and results can be achieved in as little as 5–7 days.

#### Laser or power whitening

This is where a bleaching product is painted onto your teeth by your dental professional and a light or laser is used to activate the chemical. Colour changes can be achieved more quickly with this kind of treatment as the light or laser speeds up the chemical reaction of the whitening product.

The effects of whitening treatments can last up to 3 years, however, this varies from person to person and the procedure chosen. Some people find their teeth become sensitive to cold during or after the treatment. Others report sore gums or even sore throats and white patches on the gum line. These symptoms may prevent treatment going ahead, but in most cases they are temporary and should disappear a few days after treatment is completed.

**If you have any questions about your oral health or whitening treatments, consult your dentist or dental hygienist.**

### Top tips for whiter teeth

1 Rinse your mouth thoroughly with water after every meal to dilute the staining effect of food and drinks.

2 Brush teeth with a whitening toothpaste which will help remove surface stains to reveal the natural colour of your teeth.



Follow an oral hygiene regimen that includes using both a good brushing technique and dental floss.

4 Limit your intake of caffeine-rich and heavily-pigmented foods that can contribute to staining.

5 If you need another reason to stop smoking, think about the build-up of unsightly stains on your teeth.