

## Teeth Bleaching

By Dr. Jack Fletcher, Family Dentist

Whitening teeth has become a popular procedure. There are many choices when selecting the best product or procedure for you – including how quickly you require the results, how sensitive your teeth are, and whether you have crowns, bridges or fillings.

In almost all teeth bleaching products the active bleaching chemical is hydrogen peroxide. The stronger the concentration of peroxide the faster it will work and the greater the risk of sensitivity. Lasers are also used for tooth whitening and the same risks apply.

At my office, I recommend custom bleaching trays with bleaching gel, store bought or professional grade Crest strips or Zoom 2 Advanced Power. Each of these has its own benefits and disadvantages.

The whitening system I recommend most are the custom bleaching trays. The bleaching trays are made from impressions and molds of your teeth and extend the bleaching materials to all of your teeth. There is a tray for the top arch and one for the bottom arch. The speed of bleaching and degree of sensitivity can be controlled with the type and concentration of gel used. The more concentrated gels will bleach faster but they have the potential for more sensitivity. All bleaching will relapse over time as you are exposed to staining foods and smoking, but with the custom trays you only need to buy more gel instead of a whole Crest Whitening kit. Over time these trays will save you money.

Custom tray bleaching will usually take 1-2 weeks to achieve maximum results. If sensitivity occurs there are desensitizing gels that can be used in the same trays.

Many of my patients prefer this system because they can customize their own whitening program. For example, some patients prefer to whiten only the outer side of all teeth while others want both the inner side of the tooth as well as the outer side. You can also choose to simply whiten a few teeth or all teeth. It's up to you. Custom bleaching trays let you create your own whitening options.

A second option are the store bought Crest strips which are inexpensive and cause the least sensitivity - but take 3-5 weeks to reach their best treatment only reach canine to canine. Additionally these whitening strips are hard to adapt around crowded teeth. In a big broad smile their short length leaves the premolars and molars stained.

Next, the Professional Crest strips reach to premolars and only need 1-3 weeks to reach peak effect, but tooth and gum sensitivity can be greater. Very few of my patients have had sensitivity with Crest strips.

Finally, Zoom bleaching is an in-office procedure that takes up to 2 hours. Your mouth is completely isolated so that the powerful light activated gel can only touch teeth. Usually, there are 3-4 fifteen minute applications and light treatments. Because this is a very intensive bleaching treatment you may think the potential for sensitivity is the greatest but the Zoom protocol is the best I've seen for controlling sensitivity with their protective gels. Very few Zoom patients have reported sensitivity to me and those who did only had a minor issue for a couple of days.

All of my Zoom patients have custom trays made to help apply these desensitizing gels and use take home bleaching gel for a few days after the chair procedure to fully maximize the bleaching effect.

The biggest advantage to Zoom bleaching is the short time required to get stunning results. However because there is so much chair-time required Zoom bleaching is the most expensive treatment.

I do think that Zoom bleaching produces the whitest teeth but most people wouldn't see much difference without a shade guide. Unless time is a big issue, I usually recommend the custom bleaching trays as the treatment of choice.