

Teeth Whitening

You don't have to risk nerve damage with DIY tooth whitening kits—there are natural options.

Did you know that people with whiter teeth are seen as more attractive, confident, trustworthy, and financially successful? That's according to an independent survey called, "The Impact of Whiter Teeth on Key First Impressions."

Dentists also seem to support the practice of whitening teeth. A dental consulting survey conducted by TheWealthyDentist.com asked dentists if they thought today's consumers were over-whitening. Five out of six thought that, whether done at home or in the dental office, modern tooth-whitening technology is only improving people's smiles.

Some dentists, though, admitted that tooth whitening can become too much of a good thing, to where people's teeth actually start to look fake. In fact, recent research from the University of Texas has raised the alarm concerning do-it-yourself whitening, noting that these kits can increase the risk of stomach problems, mouth infections, toothache, gum-shrinking, and nerve damage.

But there's no doubt—white teeth are in. Particularly around the holidays, you may be looking in the mirror and wanting to shake up the smile a bit. Fortunately, you don't have to go for the standard hydrogen peroxide strips and gels. There are natural options that can also give you a whiter, brighter smile.

What's the Danger in Do-It-Yourself Whitening Kits?

According to the University of Texas study, many over-the-counter bleaches have a very high acidity, which can damage the teeth. Some products are also abrasive, and while they may remove the surface stains, they can also take out some of the enamel, so you end up weakening teeth.

David McFadden, professor of oral and maxillofacial surgery at the University of Texas, told the *Daily Mail*, "Using too much bleach can cause extreme tooth sensitivity, and it's possible they could damage the nerve enough to require root-canal therapy. People with active periodontal disease may also notice soft-tissue shrinkage. And

since the bleaching trays are not custom-fitted, the uneven distribution of bleach may cause spotting.”

Whitening too much can also backfire. If you overdo it, the hydrogen peroxide can literally whiten the white out of the teeth, so your teeth become translucent, and may appear gray.

On top of all this, many whiteners have aspartame, fluorides, aluminum, benzene, and other potentially harmful toxins that you may be swallowing when you’re using these products. Ick!

Safer Options

Of course, it’s best to always talk with your dentist. In-office procedures, including custom-made bleaching trays and laser treatments, may be options you are interested in.

But to avoid all the chemicals, over-whitening, and nerve-damaging potential of regular whitening, try these natural ways to whiten—and protect—teeth. Always rinse with water afterwards, as even natural whiteners can be acidic and may weaken enamel. Don’t brush for at least an hour after using each option below.

- **Malic Acid:** You can get it by mixing one strawberry and ½ tsp baking soda. Apply to your teeth and brush gently, or simply rub on teeth with your fingers. Rinse with water afterwards to avoid excess exposure to the acid, which can strip away enamel. Baking soda and lemon will work in a similar way.
- **Healthy Dairy:** Cheese, milk, and yogurt all contain minerals that strengthen teeth and help improve their appearance, including calcium and phosphorus, which enhance enamel.
- **Apples:** Apples have natural astringents that can help whiten teeth. Try one daily for whiter, cleaner teeth.
- **Apple cider vinegar:** Just like this vinegar can remove stains on other surfaces, it may also work on your teeth. Be careful, as it can remove enamel as well. Brush carefully with the vinegar and a soft brush, and rinse thoroughly afterwards. Use for a couple weeks to see results.
- **Lemon and orange peels:** There’s no scientific evidence behind this, but some people say that the inside of lemon and orange peels will help whiten your teeth. Some advocate mixing these with ground bay leaves and making a paste. Rub the peel across your teeth, or try the juice of a fresh lemon or lime and a soft brush. Always rinse with water afterwards.
- **Sage:** Native Americans have apparently long used sage to freshen breath and whiten teeth. Sage is a natural anti-fungal, antibiotic, and astringent. Brush your teeth with sage leaves or use powdered sage leaves mixed with baking soda.
- **Holy basil and mustard oil:** This is an Ayurveda technique said to whiten teeth. Mix a paste of holy basil leaves with mustard oil, then brush. If you want to take the technique even further, use neem and babul trigs to brush with.

- **Oil pulling:** An ancient Ayurvedic technique, oil pulling is said to be a powerful means of maintaining good health as well as an effective cure for a variety of ills. You simply swish your mouth with a spoonful of high quality oil—like sesame or sunflower oil—for about 15-20 minutes. A two-week study from India found that two weeks of oil pulling caused a significant reduction in mouth bacteria, reduced plaque, and improved the health of gums. One of the nice side effects? It results in whiter, brighter teeth. Try it!