



## Tooth Bleaching

### ***What is tooth bleaching?***

Very few people have actually white teeth. Like hair and skin, teeth vary in colour. Some are yellower or darker than others, even when they are quite healthy. Teeth tend to get darker as people get older. Teeth sometimes become darker if their roots have been damaged or diseased and the 'nerve' had 'died'. Teeth may also be stained on the surface through the consumption of coloured substances such as coffee, tea, cola, tobacco and red wine. Deeper staining can also occur due to the consumption during tooth formation of certain antibiotics and fluoride. More people than ever are choosing to whiten their teeth.

Tooth colour can be effectively lightened with **Hydrogen Peroxide** (bleach), used on either the outside or the inside of the tooth.

Tooth bleaching is completely safe as long as the bleach does not touch your gums and burn them. Dentist use a special bleach that comes as a gel. When the nerve of a tooth has died (through damage or disease) and the tooth has had root canal treatment, bleach is placed inside the tooth. The bleaching agent remains in the tooth for about a week before being cleaned out so that a white filling can be placed.

### ***How does bleaching work?***

#### **Home bleaching**

The dentist will give you weak bleach gel to use at home in a tray which fits closely around your teeth. The tray makes sure that the gel does not burn your gums. You will need to put the tray in your mouth for a few hours on several occasions, as instructed by your dentist (probably over a period of weeks).

The dentist will need to use a cake mixture type of material to make moulds of your mouth (called 'impressions'), so a dental technician can make the tray to fit. At your next appointment, your dentist will check that the tray fits and shows you how to put the bleach in the tray at home.

Your dentist will make a note of your tooth colour using model teeth in different shades before they treat you. This will allow you and the dentist to compare it with the colour after bleaching.

Your teeth may be sensitive to hot and cold food and drink whilst bleaching and for a few days after bleaching.



### ***What to expect***

Extensive research and clinical studies have shown that tooth whitening under supervision of a dentist is safe. In fact, it is much less invasive than alternative techniques and is considered by many dentists as the safest cosmetic dental procedure. The active ingredient, hydrogen peroxide, breaks down to release oxygen which enters enamel and dentine and bleaches coloured substances while the tooth structure remains unchanged. For most patients, the procedure is completely non-eventful. Some patients experience some sensitivity or tingling sensations either during or after the procedure, but these usually subside after a few days.

### ***What are the benefits?***

Bleaching improves the appearance of your teeth without removing any of the natural tooth surface. Bleaching is a better option than a crown or veneer if you want to lighten the colour of healthy teeth, as the placing of crowns and veneers involves drilling away sound tooth and changing the shape of the tooth.