

## **BLEACHING BLUES AND BENEFITS: BE INFORMED**

**Dear Dr. McCrummen: What is with all of the white teeth I have been seeing lately? I find it really annoying when I am speaking to someone and I can't get my eyes off their teeth. Some teeth look fake, too white like Chiclets gum, and some even look light blue. Is bleaching teeth harmful? Can people over-bleach their teeth? The magazines, TV shows, and movies are filled with extremely white teeth and it looks so unnatural. Does it help the teeth at all? Do some toothpastes, rinses, and chewing gum really bleach teeth like they say? C.S**

*Whiter teeth*, is presently the #1 request in dental offices in the USA, because it makes people feel and look more youthful. The current trend is to have an attractive, healthy looking smile, and bleaching can help achieve that goal fast and easily.

Many people are bleaching their teeth too white. The current cosmetic guideline is that the teeth should be no whiter than the whites of the eyes. A natural tooth appearance is not pure white, especially as teeth age. Women can wear darker lipstick or use a tan-like make-up and it will make their teeth appear much whiter.

There are some products that appear to be safe but none are "FDA Approved". Many products available to the public OTC (over-the-counter) may truly be unsafe (oral cancer may take 20 years to show up), and they can easily be overused and misused. Many OTC, infomercial types, and those sold by in-home distributors are produced cheaply in China/Indonesia and deserve some caution and concern.

It is not wise to put a substance of unknown origin in your mouth for the sake of white teeth. The products may be mass produced in dirty old warehouses in a country with no hygiene rules, contain rat droppings, and unknown chemicals and concentrations.

Sensitivity and gum irritation are the most common side-effects of bleaching, which are usually short-term and no literature seems to indicate those cause permanent harm. Your dentist can recommend things to help. The side-effect of the teeth appearing translucent or light blue-gray comes from over-bleaching, and it is not reversible.

Bleaching does not prevent decay or gum disease that we know of. However, people that spend extra time bleaching may spend more quality time maintaining good oral health, and keep up on their preventive dental visits, which can reduce dental disease.

In-office concentrated bleaching can help with deep stains, provide some instant gratification, and jump-start the bleaching process. The more common power-bleaching materials used in dental offices will work equally well according to extensive research. Bleaching centers are not recommended and they can miss disease, such as cavities, gum disease, and cancer. Bleaching cannot lighten fillings or crowns and can make them more obvious.

Bleaching materials and options are ever-changing. Results vary for everyone, and with each tooth, so do not expect your teeth to look like the pictures or models; many photos have been altered, or the teeth painted to mislead consumers. OTC products only lighten the outer surface of the enamel. In-office procedures penetrate through the enamel to the source of discoloration. Toothpaste, rinses, and chewing gum whitening claims are only sales gimmicks and are very misleading.

A thorough examination, x-rays, and cleaning, as well as the treatment of any dental disease should be done before the bleaching process. Your dentist can help you attain brighter teeth, a nicer smile, and better oral health.