

The Top Dentist-Approved Ways to Whiten Teeth



by JOLENE EDGAR OCT 31, 2016 43

It was 1999 when *Friends*' Ross Geller famously bleached his teeth to glow-in-the-dark effect—giving beauty writers everywhere rich fodder for years to come. So poignant was that reference, so timeless, that it continues to pervade the teeth-whitening realm nearly two decades later. We're forever in pursuit of that ageless, immaculate smile—one that appears both unreal yet totally natural. And, mercifully, our whitening options have evolved right along with the American sitcom. (Death to the laugh track!) We asked top cosmetic dentists on both coasts for their favorite smile-brightening strategies—so you can yank it up with complete confidence.

THE INSTANT IN-OFFICE FIX



The fastest and most tech-forward whitening method offered by dentists, the **Philips Zoom WhiteSpeed** combines a 25 percent hydrogen peroxide bleach with a supercharged blue LED light, which speeds the destruction of stains, so you're out of the chair within an hour—smiling brighter than you did at check-in. (Just how much brighter is debatable: Some dentists say one to four shades, others claim up to eight. It really depends on your starting point—as “everyone has her own natural shade of white,” says New York City dentist **Victoria Veysman**—and your affinity for tannin-rich Bordeaux and French roast.)

Upon illumination, the peroxide releases oxygen molecules, which penetrate the tooth enamel to dissolve deep-set stains. Because “the light doesn't heat up the teeth as much as the lasers traditionally used in whitening, there's less sensitivity,” says **Marc Lowenberg**, a cosmetic dentist in New York City. Plus, “peroxide concentrations have increased, so we can bleach the teeth in about a third of the time it previously took.”

Though the Zoom system is outfitted with adjustable settings for comfort control, Veysman says about one in 10 people still experience minor sensitivity—what dentists call “zingers”—during or after treatment. To help improve the odds, and curtail those sharp, stinging sensations, dentists paint a masking agent over the gums and any areas of recession before starting. The procedure is then divided into three 15-minute cycles. “We'll sometimes do just one cycle on someone who's very sensitive, or maybe two, but usually not all three,” says **Kevin Sands**, a Beverly Hills dentist whose appointment book boasts names like Kardashian, Bieber, and Longoria. Does typically apply a desensitizing gel right after whitening, as well, to counter any lingering zings in the 24 hours following.

COST: UP TO \$1,200 (DEPENDING ON NUMBER OF CYCLES AND DENTIST LOCATION)

DENTIST-DISPENSED TAKE-HOME TRAYS

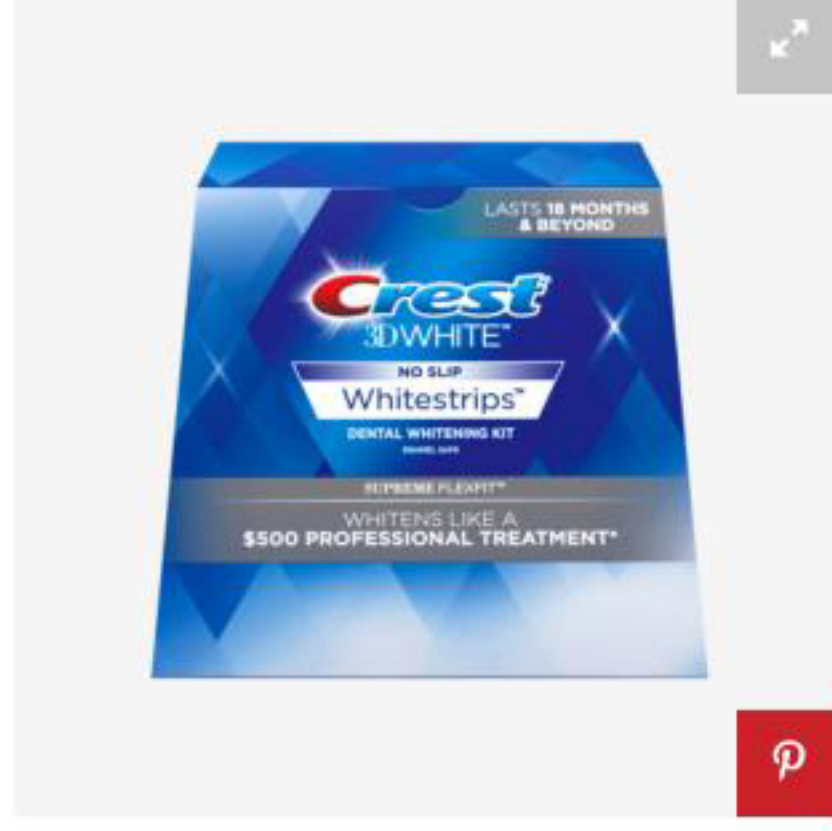


The more slow-and-steady approach to pro whitening, **customized take-away trays**, fabricated from a precise model of one's mouth, “help ensure the bleaching gel sits properly against the full surface of the teeth—but away from the gums and any sensitive areas of recession,” says Joshua Perlman of **New York City's Smile Spa**, who finds this method to be more predictable and effective than light- and laser-activated treatments. Another fan of the trays' predictability, **Sivan Finkel**, an aesthetic dentist in Manhattan, says the heat generated by lights and lasers can “temporarily dry out the teeth, creating a shade that's very white initially, but then drifts back down a bit as the teeth rehydrate.”

Bleaching trays, on the other hand, yield more stable long-term results (to the tune of three to four shades lighter), and usually spark less sensitivity, he adds. If achiness occurs, the treatment can easily be tweaked. Finkel typically starts patients with a 35 percent dose of carbamide peroxide (a slower-acting alternative to hydrogen peroxide) to be worn 30 minutes a day for one week. “If 30 minutes is too much, we drop down to fifteen minutes a day for twice as many days,” he says. Should pain persist—which almost never happens, he notes—he'll switch to a 10 percent strength, worn overnight. If docs know at the outset that discomfort is a concern, they may have patients fill their trays with Sensodyne toothpaste, and sleep with them in for a few nights prior to whitening. After bleaching, wearing a strong fluoride gel in the trays for a half hour can mitigate post-treatment zingers.

COST: APPROXIMATELY \$600

NO-DENTIST-NEEDED WHITENING STRIPS



Whether you're looking for a way to whiten on the cheap, or just keep teeth dazzling after a pro fix, the unanimous favorite among the experts we interviewed are **Crest 3D White Luxe Supreme FlexFit Whitestrips**, which are designed to be worn 30 minutes a day for three weeks. The malleable plastic strips are imbued with hydrogen peroxide—the same bleaching agent used in Zoom, just a weaker dose. Part of their appeal is that “they're really adaptable to any mouth—even if teeth are crowded or uneven,” says Emanuel Laylie, director of the **New York Center for Cosmetic Dentistry**. However, he adds, “they may not be ideal for sensitive teeth,” because they are adhere to the entire tooth—gum line to tip—and make no concessions for touchy spots.

COST: \$65

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