BEAUTY

A Pro's Guide to At-Home Teeth Whitening

Dentists weigh in on the best ways to get a brighter smile.

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Imagine you're emerging from the squishy cocoon of quarantine as a polished, even-better-than-before butterfly. For many, this vision has been the driving force behind all manner of cosmetic tweaks, from stealth injectables to ramped-up workouts. But there's aspect of self-improvement that's seeing renewed attention, as the masks come off in the light of day. That would be teeth whitening treatments—proof that a brighter smile's cultural currency has long been embedded in our collective psyche.

In the 1980s, bleaching treatments took off in dental offices, followed by to-go kits equipped with peroxide gels and molded trays. When television commercials were the primary way to reach consumers, I remember a particularly threatening tagline: "If you aren't whitening your teeth, you're staining them." Or maybe it was, "You're aging them." The message was clear either way: Take action, or suffer the ecru consequences.

"As a rule of thumb, anything you eat that will stain a white T-shirt will likely stain your teeth," says **Sharon Huang**, D.D.S., a cosmetic dentist who specializes in teeth whitening at New York City's female-founded practice Les Belles NYC. She points out that black and green tea cause more staining than coffee, and suggests drinking juices from a glass straw—then rinsing immediately with water. Brushing is a good first line of defense (Huang asks that patients wait a half-hour following an acidic meal or beverage before scrubbing weakened enamel). But when it comes to teeth whitening, she advises a professional consultation. "No two teeth are the same," she says. "Do you have thick or thin enamel? Thick enamel tends to have the best whitening results, whereas thin enamel can present some challenges. Are your teeth translucent? Whitening translucent teeth can be tricky in some cases, resulting in a graying effect." I recall a high school friend who rinsed with straight hydrogen peroxide (something dentists *beg* patients never to attempt) as an alt-bleaching idea—her teeth eventually turned a glassy shade of periwinkle.

With so many consultation-free kits available by next-day delivery, it's clear that there is some room for user error. Earlier this month during his "A Closer Look" *Late Night* segment, **Seth Meyers** lauded a specific burn on **Rudy Giuliani**, accusing him of "only using the top Crest strip." And while uniform color is an obvious goal, there isn't a clear benchmark for the right white. No shade is unnatural if you're working with a born-with-it set, according to Los Angeles–based **Kevin Sands**, D.D.S. "Unnaturally white-looking teeth have usually been restored with porcelain in a shade whiter than the natural enamel," explains the dentist, whose roster of patients includes **Lizzo** and **Drake.** (Sands poses in his lab coat on Instagram with grinning megastars, though some understandably look like they'd prefer to remain anonymous.) The most popular in-office treatment at his practice is Philips Zoom Whitening, which uses a painless, non-invasive laser to lighten enamel up to eight shades in a single session. "If you have 24 hours, it's the fastest and best way to get big results in a short amount of time," Sands says. At home, he supports the use of Crest White strips, along with the Sonicare DiamondClean ("the holy grail of toothbrushes"). Huang similarly recommends a dual approach, with in-office sessions as well as take-home kits for the "safest, fastest, most predictable results with the least sensitivity," she adds.

Still, getting started with teeth whitening at home can be a worthwhile move, according to both dentists. This roundup includes targeted brightening kits and specialized flosses; there are toothpastes that help lift stains as well as remineralize teeth. (Huang finds such formulas to be helpful in conjunction with peroxide treatments, which are thought to cause slight demineralization, thereby making teeth more sensitive. To minimize further sensitivity, she suggests steering clear of UV-light kits, which can give a "chalky white color.") There's also an example of low-tech Ayurvedic wisdom: "Coconut oil pulling is a great clean way of keeping your teeth clean and white naturally," says Huang of the vitamin-rich pantry ingredient that is naturally antibacterial and antifungal, and can help fight plaque and gingivitis. For a brighter smile this summer, here is an array of whitening options to consider.

Toothpastes

Ojook toothpaste with nHA - bamboo salt

Remineralizing teeth after whitening is great not only for sensitivity, but also to prolong a treatment's glossy, brightening effect. The nHA (nano-hydroxyapatite) in Ojook's toothpaste bonds to teeth to strengthen enamel and restore mineral density. As a bonus, the aluminum tube is recyclable.

$18 at Urban Outfitters

Intellihwhite ProWhite fluoride toothpaste with xylitol

Designed by ***Jennifer Jablow***, D.D.S., a dentist whose high-profile patients include **Ashley Graham,** Intellihwhite's toothpaste is formulated to remove stains without triggering sensitivity. "Ingredients include hydrogen peroxide and sodium bicarbonate, which are good for teeth whitening and will create a favorable pH to help remineralization," says Huang. "This also uses xylitol, an effective anticaries agent," she adds of the bacteria-inhibiting effects.

$40 at HSN

Hello Sensitivity Relief - Whitening Soothing Mint fluoride toothpaste

For those opting for teeth whitening, it's worth incorporating a toothpaste designed to ease the twinges of discomfort that can occur after a strong peroxide session. Hello's version includes active ingredients like potassium nitrate, which Huang notes "is effective in treating teeth sensitivity," as well as sodium fluoride, a known anti-cavity agent.

$6 at Ulta

Kits & Strips

Bite Whitening Gel teeth whitening kit

Offering a plastic-free option (a rare find in the teeth whitening world), Bite's gel is also safe for sensitive teeth. "I like this product," says Huang. "The formula utilizes a vegan carbamide peroxide formula with aloe vera, which soothes teeth and gums, and sodium hydroxide, which controls the pH."

$24 at Bite

Active Wow 24k White teeth whitening kit

Aside from the carbamide peroxide formula that's effective for teeth whitening, Huang appreciates the format of Active Wow's kit. "It has a good delivery system [with the] thermo-molded mouth trays to contain the material," she notes. Since LED-boosted systems can dehydrate teeth, a remineralizing addition (like the above Ojook paste) would be a helpful add.

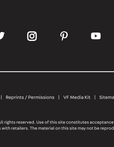
$40 at Amazon

Revive Light Therapy DPL oral care

The non-UV blue light in Revive's device can increase the effects of whitening gels and strips. While Huang doesn't love most light-based whitening systems, she points out that Revive's infrared and red light may benefit gums. "This product uses red light energy to promote circulation," she says, and "some experts think it helps cells repair themselves." She considers it a "good adjunct to daily oral health habits like brushing, flossing, and routine professional cleanings."

$100 at Revive Light Therapy

Oil-Boosted Remedies



Poppy and Someday Cardamom pulling oil

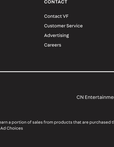
This cardamom-infused pulling oil features a gently flavored blend of coconut and sesame oils in a user-friendly liquid form. "The practice of oil pulling traces back to India and Ayurvedic traditional medicine," says Huang. "It's really easy—simply swish for 20 minutes daily. If you're new to pulling, work your way up to 20 minutes by starting with five-minute increments."

$40 at Flower + Stone

Burst Coconut whitening strips

Huang is already a fan of Burst Oral Care's coconut whitening strips. "They are simple and easy to use, and I've seen patients have good success with them for an at-home treatment," she says, adding that its 6% hydrogen peroxide concentration delivers an effective whitening boost for a quick, 15-minute treatment.

$20 at Burst



Oral Essentials Lumineux certified non-toxic whitening strips

For a non-peroxide option, Huang recommends Lumineux teeth whitening strips by Oral Essentials. Created by a team of dentists, the formula relies on coconut oil, aloe, and xylitol and is found to have the same whitening potential as leading strips, with a gentler effect on teeth and gums.

$50 at Amazon

Brushes & Flosses

Marashi Oral Health M Sonic toothbrush

Jon Marashi, D.D.S., whose patient base includes more than a few Oscar winners, is behind this cult-favorite sonic toothbrush. "The M Sonic uses the softest Dupont nylon bristles available in the marketplace," he says, explaining that they "adapt to the tooth surface better, leading to greater efficacy in cleaning microscopic debris and stains off of the tooth enamel surface." The intended result: a flashbulb smile.

$275 at Violet Grey

Curaprox Hydrosonic Pro toothbrush

When it comes to brushing, easy does it. "Abrasive brushes will strip enamel and cause gum recession," says Huang, who recommends Curaprox's hydrosonic version. "This is a good, soft brush head, and I like the compact design."

$200 at Amazon

Spotlight Oral Care dental floss for whitening teeth

Made from recycled plastic, Spotlight Oral Care's floss has another interesting detail baked into the logic: Huang points out that it's "dipped in hydrogen peroxide for effective teeth whitening."

$7 at Spotlight Oral Care

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