# Is Charcoal Whitening Safe for Teeth? | Core Dental

Canonical: https://www.coredental.com.au/is-charcoal-whitening-safe/

## Details:

Charcoal whitening products are promoted on social media as a natural way to whiten teeth, but dental professionals have safety concerns about them. Charcoal is coarse and abrasive, and it can wear away tooth enamel, which cannot grow back. At Core Dental we suggest talking to our team before you use charcoal toothpastes or powders, so we can check your teeth and explain whitening options that are supervised by a dentist.

## What is activated charcoal and how does it work on teeth?

Activated charcoal is made by heating carbon-rich materials such as coal, coconut shells or wood at high temperatures. This creates tiny pores that increase the surface area of the material. As a result it is highly absorbent, and it can bind to toxins and to surface stains on teeth. That is why it is marketed as a whitening ingredient. Removing surface stains is not the same as changing the natural shade of a tooth, and a dentist can explain the difference when you visit.

## What is the main risk of using charcoal on your teeth?

The main concern is enamel abrasion. Because charcoal is coarse, it may scrub away the outer layer of enamel. Enamel is the hard protective coating of your teeth, and once it is worn away your body cannot repair or regenerate it, so the damage is permanent. The risk is greater with gritty powders and with firm or frequent brushing.

## What happens when charcoal wears away tooth enamel?

Each layer of enamel that is scrubbed away leaves the tooth open to deterioration and decay. Over time this can lead to:

exposure of dentine, the sensitive inner layer of the tooth

increased tooth sensitivity and discomfort

irreversible damage to tooth structure

Worn enamel can also make teeth look yellower, because the dentine underneath is naturally darker. If you already notice sensitivity when you eat or drink something hot, cold or sweet, please let us know before trying any whitening product. You may also like to read our articles on tooth sensitivity and acidic drinks and tooth enamel .

## Do charcoal whitening products contain fluoride?

Many charcoal products do not contain fluoride. Fluoride helps protect teeth against decay, so brushing with a charcoal product in place of a fluoride toothpaste may reduce that protection. Check the label, and ask your dentist or hygienist which toothpaste suits you. Our article on using fluoride toothpaste explains more.

## What are safer ways to whiten your teeth?

Whitening carried out or supervised by a dentist starts with an examination, so we can check for decay, gum problems, worn enamel and existing fillings or crowns, which do not change colour with whitening. At Core Dental we offer in-chair whitening and take-home whitening kits. Whether whitening is suitable for you depends on your teeth and gums, and results and sensitivity vary from person to person. You can read about the differences between in-chair and take-home whitening and the risks involved with teeth whitening .

## How can you plan your care and make an informed decision?

A useful first step is to tell us about your concern, symptoms, timing and goals when you book. Bring relevant medical information and a list of your current medicines. Our team can then assess your teeth, gums, bite and surrounding tissues, request imaging where it is clinically appropriate, and explain which options suit you.

Ask what the recommended approach is intended to achieve, whether there are reasonable alternatives, what preparation and aftercare involve, and what risks or limitations apply. Treatment time, fees, recovery and maintenance vary with the diagnosis and the complexity of care. At Core Dental we quote before treatment starts, and a written treatment plan can help you compare stages, expected appointments and payment arrangements before you proceed.

Call 000 immediately for uncontrollable bleeding, breathing or swallowing difficulty, serious facial injury or other life-threatening symptoms. Do not wait for a dental appointment in these situations. For severe tooth pain or swelling without these emergency signs, contact your dental practice promptly. For routine care, prevention and review intervals should be tailored to your individual oral health risks rather than assumed to be the same for everyone.

## How can we help?

If you are thinking about whitening your teeth, or you have used charcoal products and are worried about sensitivity or wear, our team can help at any of our nine Core Dental clinics across Melbourne. Learn more about teeth whitening at Core Dental , call 13 13 16, or book online.

## What whitening does, and what charcoal is not doing

Start with the honest limit of this page: none of the published sources we hold addresses activated charcoal specifically. So rather than guess at it, here is what the authorities do say about how whitening works and what the regulated products contain — which is enough to place a charcoal product without inventing anything about it.

Whitening, in the Victorian Department of Health's description, is a chemical process. "A bleaching gel is applied onto the tooth surface", and what it achieves is to "lighten the colour of tooth enamel".

A gel that lightens enamel. The active ingredient is what does the work, which is why the concentration is the regulated thing.

On over-the-counter products, the Department is specific: "Products you can buy at supermarkets and chemists may use a similar ingredient but only contain a small amount, so it is not as effective."

A similar ingredient, a small amount, less effective. That is the published position on consumer whitening products generally.

And the limits on what any whitening can change at all. "Tooth decay, fillings, crowns, bridges, veneers, false teeth and some types of discolouration do not whiten."

Some types of discolouration do not whiten — which means the first useful question about a stained tooth is what is causing the stain, not which product to buy. The Department's general advice before any cosmetic treatment includes to "find out what is causing the unsatisfactory appearance of your teeth".

One more thing worth knowing about brushing abrasives in general , which is sourced and relevant whatever is in the tube: acid softens enamel, and brushing a softened surface wears it away. The Department's instruction is to "wait at least 30 minutes after the acid exposure before brushing your teeth", to use "a soft-bristled toothbrush with fluoride toothpaste", and to "brush your teeth gently, but thoroughly". Whether a particular product is abrasive is a question for its manufacturer and your dentist — but brushing harder is not the mechanism by which teeth get whiter.

Sources: Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Cosmetic dentistry and teeth whitening, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 12 December 2025); Dental erosion, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 22 October 2025). Both accessed 6 November 2026.

## The concentration rules, and why they exist

There is a legal framework behind whitening products in Australia, and it is the most useful thing to know when comparing a shelf product with a dental one. It is also the reason the two cannot produce the same result.

The Australian Dental Association's policy on teeth whitening by persons other than dental practitioners sets it out. "The Poisons Standard recognises hydrogen peroxide 3-6% and carbamide peroxide 9-18% as Schedule 5 substances requiring 'Caution', meaning that teeth whitening products containing up to these concentrations can be sold direct to consumers if they are labelled with stipulated safety warnings."

And above that: "Schedule 10 specifically states that teeth whitening products containing more than 6% hydrogen peroxide or 18% carbamide peroxide may only be sold, supplied and used by registered dental practitioners as part of their dental practise. These provisions are formalised in all state and territory poisons legislation."

What Schedule 10 means. It "lists substances of such danger to health as to warrant prohibition of their sale, supply and use other than in specified exempt circumstances". That is the category, and it explains why the stronger products are not on a shelf.

The conversion, for reading labels. "Many bleaching products contain carbamide (urea) peroxide, one-third of its concentration being equivalent to hydrogen peroxide, e.g., 18% carbamide peroxide approximates 6% hydrogen peroxide."

And the actual range in use. "The effective concentration of hydrogen peroxide varies greatly from concentrations as low as 3-6% for some products supplied to patients for home use to 35% in some office-based bleaching products."

So a consumer product is capped near the bottom of that range by law. A product that promises dramatic results while being legally available off a shelf is promising something its permitted concentration does not support.

On the marketing around such products, the ADA is direct: "The marketing of some teeth whitening products directly available to Australian consumers encourages unrealistic expectations about whitening results and promotes regular ongoing use to maintain desired effects. This is a concern given the lack of clinical data supporting frequent home use of such products over long periods."

Regular ongoing use is the business model, and the ADA's objection is the absence of data on doing that for a long time.

Why assessment comes before product choice. "Teeth whitening should only be performed if the treatment can be justified, and after a comprehensive dental examination has been conducted by a Dental Practitioner." And on who can judge suitability: "only registered dental practitioners have the expertise to assess whether bleaching is safe for individual patients, to recommend the most appropriate technique and materials, and to provide treatment that meets regulated safety and quality standards of care."

The ADA also notes where unregulated services have appeared — "beauty and hair salons, shopping mall kiosks, dedicated teeth whitening salons, or via mobile services" — and that claims of being "teeth whitening specialists" are made by people who are not registered dental practitioners.

Two side effects to expect even when it is done properly. The ADA: "The most common side-effects are transient tooth sensitivity and soft tissue irritation during or immediately following treatment." The Department says the same in plainer words: whitening "commonly causes temporary tooth sensitivity", and "if the gel overflows, it can cause temporary gum irritation". On the chemical itself, the ADA notes that "direct exposure of the skin, eyes and mucous membranes to hydrogen peroxide may cause severe irritation or burns" — which is an argument for a custom-fitted tray rather than a one-size strip.

And the limit that applies to every method. "Whitening is not permanent."

Sources: Australian Dental Association, Policy Statement 2.2.8 - Teeth Whitening (Bleaching) By Persons other than Dental Practitioners, ada.org.au (the policy states its last review as September 2025); Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Cosmetic dentistry and teeth whitening, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 12 December 2025). Both accessed 6 November 2026.

## Frequently asked questions

### *Can charcoal toothpaste damage my teeth?*

It may. Charcoal is coarse and can abrade enamel, and lost enamel does not grow back. Many charcoal toothpastes also lack fluoride. If you have used one and notice new sensitivity, please book an examination.

### *Does charcoal really whiten teeth?*

Charcoal can bind to surface stains, so teeth may look cleaner for a short time. It does not change the natural shade of the tooth, and the abrasion involved is the concern. A dentist can discuss whitening options that suit your teeth.

### *Is it safe to use charcoal powder on my teeth every day?*

Dental professionals generally advise caution. Daily use of an abrasive powder may increase the chance of enamel wear. Please ask our team for advice before you start, particularly if you have sensitive teeth or gum recession.

### *What should I do if my teeth feel sensitive after using charcoal?*

Stop using the product and book an appointment so we can examine your teeth. We can check for enamel wear and exposed dentine and suggest ways to manage sensitivity.

### *Can I whiten my teeth if I have crowns or fillings?*

Crowns and fillings do not change colour with whitening, so a dentist will check them first. We can explain what to expect and whether whitening is suitable for you.

### *Does the published advice say anything about charcoal specifically?*

Not in any source we hold, and we are not going to make a claim it does not support. What the authorities do address is how whitening works and what consumer products are permitted to contain, which is set out above.

### *How does whitening actually work?*

Chemically. The Victorian Department of Health: "A bleaching gel is applied onto the tooth surface", which "lightens the colour of tooth enamel".

### *Are supermarket whitening products as good as dental ones?*

The Department says not: "Products you can buy at supermarkets and chemists may use a similar ingredient but only contain a small amount, so it is not as effective."

### *Why can't shelf products be stronger?*

Because of the Poisons Standard. The Australian Dental Association notes that products up to "hydrogen peroxide 3-6% and carbamide peroxide 9-18%" are Schedule 5 and "can be sold direct to consumers if they are labelled with stipulated safety warnings", while anything above "6% hydrogen peroxide or 18% carbamide peroxide may only be sold, supplied and used by registered dental practitioners as part of their dental practise".

### *How do I compare a carbamide peroxide figure with a hydrogen peroxide one?*

The ADA gives the conversion: carbamide peroxide has "one-third of its concentration being equivalent to hydrogen peroxide, e.g., 18% carbamide peroxide approximates 6% hydrogen peroxide".

### *What concentrations are actually used?*

"The effective concentration of hydrogen peroxide varies greatly from concentrations as low as 3-6% for some products supplied to patients for home use to 35% in some office-based bleaching products."

### *Is there a problem with using a home product regularly?*

The ADA raises one: marketing of consumer products "encourages unrealistic expectations about whitening results and promotes regular ongoing use to maintain desired effects. This is a concern given the lack of clinical data supporting frequent home use of such products over long periods."

### *Will whitening work on all discolouration?*

No. "Tooth decay, fillings, crowns, bridges, veneers, false teeth and some types of discolouration do not whiten." The Department's general cosmetic advice is to "find out what is causing the unsatisfactory appearance of your teeth" first.

### *What side effects are normal?*

The Department: whitening "commonly causes temporary tooth sensitivity", and "if the gel overflows, it can cause temporary gum irritation". The ADA describes "transient tooth sensitivity and soft tissue irritation during or immediately following treatment", and notes that "direct exposure of the skin, eyes and mucous membranes to hydrogen peroxide may cause severe irritation or burns".

### *Should I brush harder to remove stains?*

No. Acid softens enamel and brushing a softened surface wears it away, which is why the Department asks you to "wait at least 30 minutes after the acid exposure before brushing your teeth", use "a soft-bristled toothbrush with fluoride toothpaste", and "brush your teeth gently, but thoroughly".

### *Who can say whether whitening is safe for me?*

"Only registered dental practitioners have the expertise to assess whether bleaching is safe for individual patients, to recommend the most appropriate technique and materials, and to provide treatment that meets regulated safety and quality standards of care." The ADA's position is that whitening "should only be performed if the treatment can be justified, and after a comprehensive dental examination has been conducted by a Dental Practitioner".

### *Is any whitening permanent?*

No. "Whitening is not permanent."

## Related services and further reading

Teeth whitening

All about teeth whitening

Risks involved with teeth whitening

How long does teeth whitening last?

Teeth whitening: what colour should my teeth be?

Why see a dentist for teeth whitening?

In-chair and take-home whitening

Using fluoride toothpaste

## Core Dental at a glance

Nine Core Dental clinics across Melbourne: Southbank, South Melbourne, Caroline Springs, Carrum Downs, Epping, Wyndham, Berwick, Bayside and Glenferrie.

Open six days a week: Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm and Saturday mornings.

Interest-free payment plans and HICAPS on-site claiming.

Call 13 13 16 or book online.

## Contact Core Dental

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| Phone | 13 13 16 |

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| Booking | Online through coredental.com.au, or call 13 13 16 |
| Hours | Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm, Saturday 8.00am to 1.30pm (Bayside 8.30am to 1.30pm), Sunday closed |
| Clinics | Southbank , South Melbourne , Caroline Springs , Carrum Downs , Epping , Wyndham , Berwick , Bayside , Glenferrie |

Results, recovery times and potential risks vary for each individual. This information is general in nature and is intended for people over 18. Seek advice from a qualified, AHPRA-registered practitioner before proceeding.

### *Is charcoal whitening safe for teeth?*

Dental professionals have safety concerns about charcoal whitening. Charcoal is coarse and can abrade tooth enamel, which cannot be repaired once lost. Core Dental suggests speaking with our team before using charcoal products.

### *How does activated charcoal remove stains?*

Activated charcoal is heated to create tiny pores, making it highly absorbent so it can bind to surface stains. At Core Dental we explain that this removes surface staining only and does not change the natural tooth shade.

### *What damage can charcoal do to enamel?*

Charcoal may scrub away the outer enamel layer. Once enamel is lost it does not regenerate, which can expose sensitive dentine, increase sensitivity and leave teeth open to decay.

### *Do charcoal toothpastes contain fluoride?*

Many charcoal products do not contain fluoride, which protects teeth against decay. Our team at Core Dental can advise which toothpaste suits you and whether a charcoal product is appropriate.

### *Which whitening options does Core Dental offer?*

Core Dental offers in-chair whitening and take-home whitening kits, provided after a dental examination. Suitability, results and sensitivity vary from person to person, so we assess each patient first.

### *Why check with a dentist before whitening?*

A dentist can check for decay, gum problems and worn enamel before whitening. Crowns and fillings do not change colour with whitening, so we plan around them. Core Dental provides this assessment at our clinics.

### *How can I book a whitening consultation at Core Dental?*

Call Core Dental on 13 13 16 or book online through coredental.com.au. We have nine clinics across Melbourne, open Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm and Saturday mornings.

### *What should I do if my teeth are sensitive after charcoal use?*

Stop using the product and book an examination with Core Dental. Our team can check for enamel wear and exposed dentine and suggest ways to manage sensitivity.