Tooth Colour and Is Teeth Whitening Safe? | Core Dental

Canonical: https://www.coredental.com.au/teeth-whitening-colour-teeth-safe-whiten/

Details:

There is no single correct tooth colour. Tooth shade varies between people because of tooth form, developmental differences such as fluorosis or tetracycline staining, diet, and lifestyle factors such as smoking. Teeth also naturally darken and become more opaque with age. When teeth whitening is done appropriately, under the guidance of a dental professional, it is a non-invasive and commonly used cosmetic treatment that can lighten the shade of your teeth. At Core Dental we start with a check-up, so we can tell you whether whitening suits you.

Why does tooth colour vary between people?

Tooth colour varies from person to person for several reasons:

Tooth form and structure. The thickness and translucency of enamel and the colour of the dentine beneath differ from person to person.

Developmental differences. Conditions such as fluorosis (changes in enamel linked to high fluoride exposure while teeth were forming) or tetracycline staining (linked to certain antibiotics taken during tooth development) can cause marks or an altered colour.

Diet. Frequently having dark-coloured food and drink, such as coffee, tea, red wine or cola, can stain teeth over time.

Lifestyle factors. Smoking and gaps in oral hygiene can add to staining and build-up on the teeth.

Because the causes differ, the right approach also differs. Some stains respond well to whitening and others may suit a different option, such as veneers .

Does tooth colour change with age?

Yes. Teeth naturally darken and become more opaque with age. Over time the enamel can wear thinner, which lets more of the darker dentine show through, and everyday staining can build up. This is a normal part of ageing and does not mean something is wrong with your teeth. If you would like a lighter shade, our dentists can talk with you about your options.

Is teeth whitening safe?

Teeth whitening is a non-invasive, commonly used cosmetic dental treatment when it is performed appropriately and the right product is used for the right patient. It can help restore or lighten the shade of your teeth. As with any treatment, there can be side effects, such as temporary tooth sensitivity or gum irritation, and results vary from person to person. Whitening only changes natural tooth structure, so it does not change the colour of crowns, veneers or fillings.

Whitening products differ in strength and quality, and some products available online or in shops may not be suitable for everyone. That is one reason to speak to a dental professional first. You can read more about the risks involved with teeth whitening and why to see a dentist for whitening .

What should you do before having your teeth whitened?

It is important to have a thorough dental check-up and clean beforehand. This is for two reasons:

Active dental disease, such as cavities, can be aggravated by whitening treatments, so it helps to find and treat problems first.

Tartar and plaque deposits can reduce how well whitening works if they are not removed first.

At Core Dental we offer in-chair whitening and take-home whitening kits. Your dentist can explain how each works, which suits your teeth and lifestyle, and what to expect. You can read more about in-chair and take-home whitening .

Who should avoid teeth whitening?

Teeth whitening is generally not recommended for pregnant women, breastfeeding women or people with allergies to peroxide. It may also not be suitable if you have untreated decay, gum disease, very sensitive teeth or worn enamel. Please tell your dentist about your medical history, any allergies and any medicines you take, so they can advise whether whitening is safe for you.

How long do whitening results last?

How long results last depends on your diet, your habits and how well you look after your teeth. Frequent dark-coloured food and drink and smoking can bring staining back sooner, while regular brushing, cleaning between your teeth and professional cleans can help keep results looking fresh. Some people choose to top up their results from time to time. See our guide on how long teeth whitening lasts .

What should you ask your dentist about whitening?

A useful first step is to explain your concern, how you feel about your current shade and your goals when you book. Bring relevant medical information and a list of your current medicines. You may like to ask:

Is whitening suitable for my teeth, or is something else more appropriate?

Which option do you recommend, and why?

What side effects might I notice, and how long might they last?

What will it cost, and what is included?

How can I look after my results?

A written plan can help you compare the stages and costs before you proceed. At Core Dental we quote before treatment starts and offer interest-free payment plans.

Further detail from Core Dental

The following points are drawn from Core Dental's own published material on this topic. They are included here for completeness, and anything that applies to your own treatment should be confirmed with your clinician.

The active ingredients in teeth whitening, carbamide peroxide or hydrogen peroxide, and the associated oxygen molecules break down the stained substances in the tooth structure. Results can vary between individuals depending on the initial tooth shade, the type of discolouration and the method of whitening used. Frequent touch-ups will likely be required to maintain the level of

improvement, and we recommend you avoid or minimize exposure to dark, staining food and habits that may have caused the initial staining. With accurate custom-made trays for home whitening and adequately placed safety barriers during in-chair whitening, the risk of gum irritation should be significantly minimised.

Over-the-counter whitening products and whitening toothpastes have a lower concentration of the active ingredient than those prescribed by your dentist. Some over-the-counter products can be abrasive and may cause damage to enamel, increasing the risk of sensitivity as a result. Most of the adverse effects are due to inappropriate or incorrect use of whitening products.

What does the regulation of whitening products tell you about safety?

"Is whitening safe?" has a more precise answer than yes or no, because Australian law draws an explicit line based on concentration.

The Australian Dental Association sets out where it falls. 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." Above those concentrations the position inverts: Schedule 10 "lists substances of such danger to health as to warrant prohibition of their sale, supply and use other than in specified exempt circumstances", and the ADA notes 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."

The relationship between the two chemicals explains the two thresholds: the ADA notes that carbamide peroxide is roughly one third as strong, so "18% carbamide peroxide approximates 6% hydrogen peroxide."

The range in practical use is wide. Concentrations run "as low as 3-6% for some products supplied to patients for home use to 35% in some office-based bleaching products." A supermarket kit and an in-chair treatment are not the same chemistry.

On safety itself, the ADA's summary of the evidence is reassuring but specific: "peer reviewed studies indicate that peroxide-containing teeth bleaching products are safe and effective when used by or under the supervision of a dentist and according to the professional directions for use." Note the two conditions attached. And the side effects it names are real though generally short-lived: "the most common side-effects are transient tooth sensitivity and soft tissue irritation during or immediately following treatment". At concentration, hydrogen peroxide is not harmless — direct exposure "of the skin, eyes and mucous membranes to hydrogen peroxide may cause severe irritation or burns."

Source: Australian Dental Association, Policy Statement 2.2.8, ada.org.au (last reviewed September 2025; accessed 3 November 2026).

Why does the ADA single out non-dental whitening services?

Because the setting has changed faster than public understanding of it, and the concentration rules apply regardless of where a product is used.

The ADA observes that whitening services "are now also increasingly offered by unregulated, unqualified non dental practitioners in settings such as beauty and hair salons, shopping mall kiosks, dedicated teeth whitening salons, or via mobile services that travel to a location convenient to the consumer." It also notes a specific marketing claim: many such services "claim that their practitioners are 'teeth whitening specialists' with the knowledge or training to perform teeth whitening procedures safely."

Its objection is about assessment rather than turf: "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." This is why 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."

There is a related caution about long-term repeat use that rarely appears in advertising. The ADA notes that the marketing of consumer products "encourages unrealistic expectations about whitening results and promotes regular ongoing use to maintain desired effects", and that this "is a concern given the lack of clinical data supporting frequent home use of such products over long periods."

The Australian Dental Association also records that regulators are expected to act in this space, calling on the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission to "continually monitor the advertising and supply of teeth whitening products and services to assess and enforce compliance with relevant legislation, including state and territory poisons laws."

One further Victorian detail applies if a light or laser is proposed. The ADA cites "AS/NZS 4173:2018, Safe use of lasers and intense light sources in health care" as specifying requirements including training standards, and notes that while registered dental practitioners with appropriate training may use Class 4 lasers, "Western Australian, Queensland, Victorian, and Tasmania legislation requires that practitioners in these states first obtain a licence to do so from the appropriate state regulatory authority."

Frequently asked questions

Is there a correct colour for teeth?

No. Natural tooth shade varies widely between people and is influenced by enamel thickness, dentine colour, age, diet and lifestyle. Your dentist can talk with you about a shade that looks natural for your teeth.

Can whitening change the colour of crowns or fillings?

No. Whitening works on natural tooth structure and does not change the colour of crowns, veneers or tooth-coloured fillings. If you have restorations on visible teeth, tell your dentist so they can plan around them.

Is it safe to whiten my teeth during pregnancy?

Whitening is generally not recommended during pregnancy or while breastfeeding. It is usually advised to wait. Please talk with your dentist about your circumstances and what options may suit you in the meantime.

Does whitening cause sensitivity?

Some people notice temporary tooth sensitivity or gum irritation after whitening. It often settles after a short time, but tell your dentist if it continues, because they can adjust the approach.

Do I need a check-up before whitening?

Yes, it is important. A check-up and clean help find cavities or gum problems that whitening could aggravate, and they remove plaque and tartar that can reduce how well whitening works.

Is whitening safe, according to the evidence?

The Australian Dental Association states that peer reviewed studies indicate peroxide-containing bleaching products are safe and effective "when used by or under the supervision of a dentist and according to the professional directions for use". Both conditions are part of the finding. The most common side effects it names are transient tooth sensitivity and soft tissue irritation during or immediately after treatment.

What concentration is legal to sell directly to consumers?

Under the Poisons Standard as described by the ADA, products up to 6% hydrogen peroxide or 18% carbamide peroxide are Schedule 5 substances requiring a "Caution" label and may be sold direct to consumers with the stipulated safety warnings. Above that, Schedule 10 restricts sale, supply and use to registered dental practitioners as part of their dental practice, and these provisions are formalised in all state and territory poisons legislation.

Are salon and kiosk whitening services covered by the same rules?

The concentration limits attach to the product regardless of setting. The ADA notes that whitening is increasingly offered in beauty salons, shopping mall kiosks, dedicated whitening salons and mobile services by people who are not dental practitioners, and that many describe their staff as "teeth whitening specialists". Its position is that only registered dental practitioners have the expertise to assess whether bleaching is safe for an individual patient.

Is frequent home whitening a good idea long term?

The ADA raises it as a concern. It notes that marketing of consumer products promotes regular ongoing use to maintain results, and that this is a concern "given the lack of clinical data supporting frequent home use of such products over long periods".

Does a light or laser need a licence in Victoria?

For a Class 4 laser, yes. The ADA states that registered dental practitioners with appropriate training may undertake procedures using Class 4 lasers, but that Victorian legislation — along with Western Australian, Queensland and Tasmanian — requires practitioners to first obtain a licence from the appropriate state regulatory authority. The relevant safety standard is AS/NZS 4173:2018.

Why are the two peroxide thresholds different figures?

Because carbamide peroxide is about one third as strong as hydrogen peroxide. The ADA notes that 18% carbamide peroxide approximates 6% hydrogen peroxide, so the two thresholds express the same practical limit in two different compounds.

Related services and further reading

Teeth whitening

All about teeth whitening

Why go to the dentist for teeth whitening

In-chair and take-home whitening

How long does teeth whitening last?

Is charcoal whitening safe?

Risks involved with teeth whitening

Dental check-up

Composite and porcelain veneers

How can we help?

If you are thinking about whitening, our dentists can check your teeth, explain your options and recommend what suits you. You can also explore our cosmetic dentistry services. Call 13 13 16 or book online at any of our nine Core Dental practices.

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.

We quote before treatment starts and offer interest-free payment plans.

Call 13 13 16 or book online.

Contact Core Dental

Phone	13 13 16
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 Saturday 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.

Why do some people have darker or differently coloured teeth?

Tooth colour varies with tooth form, developmental differences such as fluorosis or tetracycline staining, diet and lifestyle such as smoking. Core Dental dentists examine your teeth to work out the cause before recommending whitening or another option.

Do teeth get darker as you age?

Yes, teeth naturally darken and become more opaque with age, partly because enamel thins and dentine shows through. Core Dental dentists can discuss options if you would like a lighter shade.

Which patients are not advised to have whitening?

Whitening is generally not recommended for pregnant or breastfeeding women or people allergic to peroxide. Tell your Core Dental dentist about your medical history and medicines so they can advise whether it suits you.

What happens before whitening at Core Dental?

At Core Dental we recommend a thorough check-up and clean first. This finds cavities or gum problems that whitening could aggravate and removes plaque and tartar that can reduce how well whitening works.

What whitening options does Core Dental offer?

Core Dental offers in-chair whitening and take-home whitening kits. Our dentists explain how each works and which suits your teeth, lifestyle and sensitivity, and we quote before treatment starts.

Does whitening affect crowns and fillings?

No. Whitening only changes natural tooth structure, so crowns, veneers and fillings keep their colour. Core Dental dentists plan around existing restorations on visible teeth.

How do 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 and are open Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm and Saturday mornings, with Sunday closed.