In-Chair vs Take-Home Teeth Whitening Kits | Core Dental

Canonical:
https://www.coredental.com.au/what-is-the-difference-between-in-chair-whitening-and-take-home-whitening-kits/

Details:

In-chair whitening is a teeth whitening procedure completed in the dental surgery, taking approximately 90 minutes. Your cheeks, lips and gums are protected, whitening gel is applied to the tooth surfaces, and a blue light is used to activate the whitening effect. Take-home whitening kits use custom-fitted trays that you wear at home, usually for about two weeks. At Core Dental we offer both, and your dentist can help you choose the option that suits your teeth and lifestyle. Results vary for each person.

What is in-chair whitening and how long does it take?

In-chair whitening is completed within the dental surgery and gives you a visible change in one appointment, which takes approximately 90 minutes. Your dentist or a member of our clinical team protects your cheeks, lips and gums, applies whitening gel directly onto the tooth surfaces and uses a blue light to activate the whitening effect.

Stains and discolouration can be removed or reduced, although the amount of change depends on the type of stain, your natural tooth colour and the condition of your teeth.

What technology do we use for in-chair whitening?

At Core Dental we use Philips Zoom WhiteSpeed technology for in-chair whitening. Because the gel and light are applied under clinical supervision, our team can monitor your comfort and protect your gums throughout the appointment.

Are there side effects from in-chair whitening?

Yes. The stronger gel formulation used for in-chair whitening can cause temporary sensitivity, typically lasting 24 to 48 hours after the procedure. This can usually be managed with pain relief medication, following the directions on the packaging, or with a toothpaste made for sensitive teeth. If sensitivity is severe or lasts longer, contact us.

Our article on the risks involved with teeth whitening explains more.

How do take-home whitening kits work?

Take-home whitening kits use custom-fitted trays made from moulds of your teeth. Syringes of bleaching material are dispensed into the trays as instructed by your dentist. The trays are worn consecutively for approximately two weeks, either during the day or at night, depending on the bleaching system provided.

Because the trays are made to fit your teeth, the gel stays where it is meant to be. Many people find the gentler, gradual approach less likely to cause sensitivity, although everyone responds differently.

Do you need to see a dentist before booking whitening?

Before whitening, we advise a check-up and clean to make sure your teeth are healthy. Your dentist may recommend some dental treatment first, to support the whitening result or to reduce sensitivity. Clean teeth matter because calculus and plaque built up on your teeth prevent the whitening agent from diffusing into the tooth.

Fillings or fixed prosthetic work at the back of the mouth are usually completed before custom-fitted trays are made, because the shape of the teeth may change with treatment. The shade of fillings, crowns and bridges cannot be altered after they are placed. In some cases where front fillings or prosthetic work are needed, your dentist may suggest whitening first, then allowing some time for the colour to settle. Dental treatment can then be completed to match your whiter natural teeth. A check-up helps your dentist plan this properly.

Are the results permanent?

No, results are not permanent. Teeth naturally take up stains from the mouth over time, which may come from what we eat or drink and from lifestyle choices such as smoking. After whitening, we advise avoiding dark-coloured food and drinks for 48 hours, because stain uptake is higher during this period.

To help your result last, you can reduce dark-coloured food and drinks in general, rinse with water after foods with dark pigments, or drink coffee and tea through a straw. Read more in our article on how long teeth whitening lasts .

Which option should you choose?

If sticking to a daily routine or finding time feels difficult, in-chair whitening may suit you better because it works in a single appointment. If you can commit to daily use of your whitening trays, you may prefer take-home whitening kits, which tend to be less sensitive. Take-home kits can also be used to top up the shade between in-chair sessions. Ultimately, it comes down to personal preference, and a discussion with your dentist can help you make an informed decision.

Fees for whitening packages are published on our clinic pages. As at September 2026, we listed a check-up, clean and Zoom whitening package at $750 and a check-up, clean and take-home whitening package at $650. Please confirm current prices when you book.

How do you plan your care with our team?

A useful first step is to explain your goals, any sensitivity and your timing when you book. Bring relevant medical information and a current medicines list. Your dentist can then assess your teeth, gums and existing dental work, request imaging when clinically appropriate and explain which options are suitable.

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. 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. For severe tooth pain or swelling without these emergency signs, contact us promptly.

How can we help?

If you would like to talk about whitening, our team can help at any of our nine Core Dental practices. Call 13 13 16 or book online. You can also read about teeth whitening at Core Dental and all about teeth whitening .

The two methods as the Department describes them

Both options are described in the published advice in a single paragraph each, and the descriptions are more informative than most comparisons because they state the concentration logic and the timeframe together.

In the clinic. The Victorian Department of Health: "Option 1: in the dental clinic - high concentration gel is painted on the teeth for about an hour."

High concentration, painted on, about an hour. One appointment.

At home. "Option 2: at home - put the gel in a custom-fit whitening mouthguard and wear it for a few hours or overnight, for around one to 2 weeks."

Note "custom-fit". The take-home option described here is a tray made for your teeth, not a strip or a one-size tray — which matters because the Department's listed risk is that "if the gel overflows, it can cause temporary gum irritation".

And there is a third option for one specific situation. "A third type of whitening called 'internal whitening,' is specifically for teeth that have discoloured after root canal treatment and involves putting the bleach inside the tooth in the dental clinic."

Why the concentrations differ, and what the real range is. The Australian Dental Association: "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 the trade is concentration against time. A clinic uses a strong gel for an hour. A take-home kit uses a weaker gel for hours at a time across one to two weeks. Both are applying the same kind of chemistry over a different exposure.

Where a supermarket product sits in that picture. "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." And legally it cannot be otherwise: 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".

A dentist-supplied take-home kit is therefore not the same product as a shelf kit, even though both are used at home. The difference is what may lawfully be dispensed.

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

What is the same either way

The choice between the two methods changes the schedule. It does not change the limits, the side effects or the maintenance — and those are the parts that decide whether you are happy a year later.

The same things will not whiten. "Tooth decay, fillings, crowns, bridges, veneers, false teeth and some types of discolouration do not whiten." Neither method changes a restoration, so a crown or a composite filling on a front tooth stays the colour it is.

The same side effects apply. 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".

Neither is permanent. "Whitening is not permanent." No source we have read gives a duration for either method, so we are not going to claim one lasts longer than the other.

The same maintenance list is published for both. For longer lasting effects, the Department advises: "brush your teeth twice a day and floss once a day"; "do not smoke and limit food and drinks with strong colours such as black coffee and red wine"; "visit the dentist every 6 to 12 months for professional cleaning."

Three behaviours, one of which is an appointment. Note that the Department's maintenance advice is about habits rather than about repeating the whitening.

The same prerequisite applies. "The first step is to make sure your teeth and mouth are in good health", and "treat any disease first. Your health is the priority." The ADA's requirement is that whitening follow "a comprehensive dental examination ... conducted by a Dental Practitioner", and that "only registered dental practitioners have the expertise to assess whether bleaching is safe for individual patients, to recommend the most appropriate technique and materials".

Recommend the most appropriate technique — which is to say the choice between in-clinic and take-home is part of the assessment rather than a preference to be ordered from a menu.

And the same questions are worth asking. "What options are available and the pros and the cons of each option."; "What results can be reasonably expected."; "What costs, time and money, are involved and if payment options are available."; "Any possible side effects or complications."

On pace , the Department notes the practical difference between the two: "If it is a simple procedure, it may be done on the day. If it is a complex procedure, you may need time to think about your options, or see specialists over multiple visits."

One factor that may decide it for you. The Department asks you to consider "how much effort you would be prepared to put into looking after your teeth at home in the future", since "most cosmetic dental treatment requires extra care at home". A one to two week regimen of wearing a tray overnight is a different ask from a single hour in a chair, and that is a fair thing to weigh openly.

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

Frequently asked questions

Is one whitening option suitable for everyone?

No single option suits everyone. In-chair whitening works in one visit, while take-home kits are used gradually over about two weeks. Your dentist will suggest an option based on your teeth, your sensitivity and how much time you have.

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

Yes, but whitening does not change the shade of fillings, crowns or bridges. Your dentist may suggest whitening first and completing any front tooth work afterwards, so it can be matched to your whiter teeth.

Can I eat normally after whitening?

For the first 48 hours, we advise avoiding dark-coloured food and drinks such as coffee, tea and red wine, because stain uptake is higher in this period. Your dentist will give you aftercare advice for your treatment.

Can I use a take-home kit after in-chair whitening?

Yes. Take-home kits can be used to top up the shade between in-chair sessions. Ask your dentist when it is suitable for your teeth.

What happens at an in-clinic whitening appointment?

The Victorian Department of Health describes it in one line: "Option 1: in the dental clinic - high concentration gel is painted on the teeth for about an hour."

How does a take-home kit work?

"Option 2: at home - put the gel in a custom-fit whitening mouthguard and wear it for a few hours or overnight, for around one to 2 weeks." Note "custom-fit" — the tray is made for your teeth.

Why does the tray need to be custom-fitted?

Because of overflow. The Department's listed risk is that "if the gel overflows, it can cause temporary gum irritation", and the ADA notes that "direct exposure of the skin, eyes and mucous membranes to hydrogen peroxide may cause severe irritation or burns".

Why is the clinic gel stronger?

Different exposure, different concentration. "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 a dentist's take-home kit the same as a supermarket one?

No, and it cannot be. Shelf products "may use a similar ingredient but only contain a small amount, so it is not as effective", and 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".

Is there an option for a single dark tooth?

Yes, if it followed root canal treatment. "A third type of whitening called 'internal whitening,' is specifically for teeth that have discoloured after root canal treatment and involves putting the bleach inside the tooth in the dental clinic."

Which method lasts longer?

The published advice does not say, and neither is permanent: "Whitening is not permanent." We are not going to claim one outlasts the other without a source.

How do I keep the result for longer?

The Department's list is the same for both methods: "brush your teeth twice a day and floss once a day"; "do not smoke and limit food and drinks with strong colours such as black coffee and red wine"; "visit the dentist every 6 to 12 months for professional cleaning."

Will either method whiten my crown or filling?

No. "Tooth decay, fillings, crowns, bridges, veneers, false teeth and some types of discolouration do not whiten."

Which should I choose?

That is part of the assessment rather than a menu choice. "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 whitening should follow "a comprehensive dental examination".

What should I weigh up myself?

How much ongoing effort suits you. The Department asks you to consider "how much effort you would be prepared to put into looking after your teeth at home in the future", and a one to two week tray regimen is a different commitment from a single appointment.

Do I have to decide on the day?

No. "If it is a simple procedure, it may be done on the day. If it is a complex procedure, you may need time to think about your options, or see specialists over multiple visits."

Related services and further reading

Teeth whitening

All about teeth whitening

How long does teeth whitening last?

Risks involved with teeth whitening

Why should I go to the dentist for teeth whitening?

Difference between porcelain and composite veneers

Difference between silver fillings and white fillings

Difference between a crown and a porcelain filling

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, with Monday to Friday hours to 6.00pm and Saturday mornings.

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

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 mornings, Sunday closed

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.

How long does in-chair whitening take at Core Dental?

In-chair whitening at Core Dental takes approximately 90 minutes in the dental surgery. Our team protects your cheeks, lips and gums, applies the whitening gel and uses a blue light to activate the whitening effect.

Which whitening technology does Core Dental use in the chair?

Core Dental uses Philips Zoom WhiteSpeed technology for in-chair whitening. Your dentist can explain how the procedure works and whether it suits your teeth during a consultation.

How long can sensitivity last after in-chair whitening?

The stronger gel used for in-chair whitening can cause temporary sensitivity, typically lasting 24 to 48 hours. Core Dental dentists can advise on pain relief and sensitive-tooth toothpaste, and you should contact us if it lasts longer.

How are take-home whitening trays made at Core Dental?

Our Core Dental team makes custom-fitted trays from moulds of your teeth. Your dentist dispenses bleaching material into the trays as instructed, and they are worn for approximately two weeks, in the day or at night.

Why does Core Dental recommend a check-up before whitening?

We advise a check-up and clean first so your dentist can confirm your teeth are healthy, remove plaque and calculus that block the whitening agent, and plan any fillings or crowns so shades can be matched.

What should I avoid after whitening?

Core Dental advises avoiding dark-coloured food and drinks for 48 hours after whitening, when stain uptake is higher. Rinsing with water after dark foods and using a straw for coffee and tea may help results last.

How much do Core Dental whitening packages cost?

As at September 2026 we listed a check-up, clean and Zoom whitening package at $750 and a check-up, clean and take-home whitening package at $650. Please confirm current prices with Core Dental when booking.

How do I book whitening at Core Dental?

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