Why See a Dentist for Teeth Whitening? | Core Dental

Canonical: https://www.coredental.com.au/why-should-i-go-to-the-dentist-for-teeth-whitening/

Details:

Having your teeth whitened by a dentist means your mouth is checked first, and the treatment is carried out in a setting that protects your gums. Dentists are trained to diagnose and treat conditions such as active gum disease or cavities before whitening begins, because whitening gel can irritate or worsen them if applied incorrectly. A dentist can also assess whether crowns, veneers or fillings on your front teeth will affect the result. At Core Dental we offer in-chair and take-home whitening after an examination.

Why is it important to have a dental check-up before getting teeth whitened?

Dentists are trained to diagnose and treat existing dental conditions, such as active gum disease or dental caries (cavities), before whitening begins. Hydrogen peroxide, the active ingredient in whitening products, can worsen these conditions if applied incorrectly, so a comprehensive dental check and clean is recommended before whitening. The clean also removes plaque or tartar build-up, which can be responsible for some staining.

Can teeth whitening be ineffective if you have veneers, crowns or root canal treatment?

Yes. If you have porcelain or composite veneers, crowns, or root canal treatment completed on your front teeth, teeth whitening may not be effective. Whitening products lighten natural tooth structure and do not change the colour of restorations, so the colours may no longer match afterwards. Only a dentist can assess your previous dental treatment accurately and recommend suitable cosmetic solutions.

What risk does teeth whitening pose to your gums if it is not done properly?

When whitening gel is applied incorrectly to soft tissues such as the gums, it may cause superficial soft tissue burns. Having whitening done in a dental setting allows the dental team to protect the soft tissues from this kind of harm. This protection may be poorly managed or overlooked by under-regulated mobile whitening services.

Why might in-chair whitening from a dentist give a different result to over-the-counter products or mobile services?

Dentists have access to professional-grade equipment and to whitening gels with higher concentrations of active ingredient than products sold over the counter. Professional treatment is also tailored to your teeth after an assessment. Over-the-counter options such as whitening toothpastes, activated charcoal

pastes and strips tend to work only on the surface. Results vary for each person, so your dentist can explain what to expect for your teeth.

Should you use activated charcoal products and whitening toothpastes? Do they work?

Activated charcoal pastes and whitening toothpastes work on surface stains to some degree, because they contain an abrasive. These abrasives may seem successful at first, but over time they may wear the enamel, especially if paired with an aggressive tooth-brushing technique. When enamel wears down it exposes dentine, the yellow layer underneath, which may make teeth look darker or more yellow. Once enamel is worn away, teeth can also become more sensitive, and whitening may be less effective.

Toothpastes marketed as containing the whitening ingredient used by dentists, which is hydrogen peroxide, are unlikely to whiten teeth. The hydrogen peroxide in them is not kept separate from water and is not left on the teeth for long enough to have a whitening effect. You can read more in our article on whether charcoal whitening is safe .

What options can your dentist offer if you want your teeth whitened?

There are two main professional options.

1. In-chair whitening. This is usually offered in a single session of about an hour or more, using a hydrogen peroxide gel at a higher concentration than over-the-counter products. At the end of the session teeth are usually visibly lighter, and results can last about 12 months, although this varies. At Core Dental we offer in-chair Zoom whitening.
2. At-home whitening. The alternative is a take-home kit using a lower-concentration whitening solution, which you apply sparingly at home in custom whitening trays made by your dentist to fit your teeth and protect your gums. The trays are worn for 30 minutes to 1 hour, or overnight if your dentist advises. This process gradually whitens your teeth over about a week or so.

Results may vary depending on your starting shade and on factors such as smoking, alcohol and food pigments in coffee, tea and the like. Always consult your dentist. Our article on the difference between in-chair and take-home whitening goes into more detail.

What should you ask your dentist before whitening?

It helps to tell us about any sensitivity, gum problems or previous dental work, and to bring relevant medical information and a list of your current medicines. You may like to ask whether whitening is suitable for you, what the likely result is, what risks and limitations apply, how long results can last, and what the cost covers. Fees, offers and rebates can change, so please confirm the current written terms before booking or paying.

How can we help?

If you are thinking about whitening, our team can examine your teeth and gums and talk you through in-chair and take-home options at any of our nine Core Dental practices. Call 13 13 16 or book online. You can read more about teeth whitening at Core Dental . We quote before treatment starts, and you can ask about our interest-free payment plans.

The legal answer, not the marketing answer

There is a straightforward regulatory reason why whitening done by a dentist is a different thing from whitening bought off a shelf or had at a kiosk. It is written down, it applies in every state, and it is more persuasive than any claim about results.

The Australian Dental Association's policy on whitening by persons other than dental practitioners:

"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."

"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 is. It "lists substances of such danger to health as to warrant prohibition of their sale, supply and use other than in specified exempt circumstances". A registered dental practitioner using them in practice is one of those circumstances. Nobody else is.

So the practical difference is a matter of what may lawfully be 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." The Department makes the same point in plain terms about shelf products: they "may use a similar ingredient but only contain a small amount, so it is not as effective".

There is also a requirement about assessment, not just supply. "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."

Justified, and after an examination. The reason is in the next quote.

On expertise. "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."

And on the claims made elsewhere. "Many non-dental practitioner teeth whitening services claim that their practitioners are 'teeth whitening specialists' with the knowledge or training to perform teeth whitening procedures safely." The ADA records where those services operate: "beauty and hair salons, shopping mall kiosks, dedicated teeth whitening salons, or via mobile services that travel to a location convenient to the consumer."

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.

What the examination is actually for

"See a dentist first" sounds like a formality. The published reasons are specific, and three of them change what treatment you would choose.

Reason one: some discolouration will not respond at all. "Tooth decay, fillings, crowns, bridges, veneers, false teeth and some types of discolouration do not whiten." The Department's general cosmetic advice begins with diagnosing the cause: "find out what is causing the unsatisfactory appearance of your teeth."

If the cause is decay, whitening is not the treatment. If it is an old composite filling on a front tooth, whitening the neighbouring enamel will make the mismatch worse rather than better.

Reason two: there is a different technique for one specific cause. "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."

A single dark tooth after root canal treatment is a recognised situation with its own approach, done inside the tooth, in a clinic. No external product addresses it.

Reason three: health comes before appearance, in that order. "Cosmetic dentistry procedures can improve the appearance of your teeth and your smile. But 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."

What else the Department says the appointment should cover. Its list of what to do before starting is to "treat any disease first", "find out what is causing the unsatisfactory appearance of your teeth", "talk about the range of treatment options", and "work out a realistic plan that suits you".

The questions it suggests you ask , verbatim: "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."

If a light or laser is involved, there is a licensing point specific to Victoria. "All registered dental practitioners with appropriate levels of training and competence are permitted to undertake dental procedures using Class 4 lasers, but 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." The relevant standard is "AS/NZS 4173:2018, Safe use of lasers and intense light sources in health care", which "specifies requirements for dental practices and the cosmetics industry, including required standards of training".

And practitioners are themselves bound by published guidance. The ADA records that in August 2021 the Dental Board of Australia published guidance for registered dental practitioners on using and supplying teeth whitening products, which "cites the Poisons Standard, Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) advertising requirements, and Australian Consumer Law", and states that "You can only use teeth whitening products in line with your training and the law".

What to expect either way. Whitening "commonly causes temporary tooth sensitivity", gel overflow "can cause temporary gum irritation", and "whitening is not permanent". Having it done by a practitioner does not remove those; it means someone assessed whether they are acceptable for your teeth before starting.

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 teeth whitening safe for my gums?

Whitening gel can cause superficial burns if it touches the gums. When done by a dental team, the soft tissues are protected and your gums and teeth are checked first. Tell us if you have sore or bleeding gums.

Will whitening change the colour of my crowns or veneers?

Whitening lightens natural tooth structure only. Crowns, veneers and some fillings do not change colour, so they may look darker than your whitened teeth. A dentist can advise on options before you start.

Do whitening toothpastes and charcoal products work?

They may lift some surface stains because they contain abrasives, but they can wear enamel over time, particularly with hard brushing. Toothpastes with peroxide are unlikely to whiten because it is not left on teeth long enough.

How long do in-chair whitening results last?

Results can last around 12 months, although this varies with your teeth, diet and habits such as smoking, coffee, tea and red wine. Your dentist can suggest ways to maintain your result.

Can I have teeth whitening if I have gum disease or cavities?

Active gum disease and cavities should usually be treated first, because whitening gel can irritate or worsen them. A check and clean before whitening helps your dentist plan safe treatment.

What is the legal difference between dental and shop-bought whitening?

Concentration. 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". Above "6% hydrogen peroxide or 18% carbamide peroxide", the Australian Dental Association notes they "may only be sold, supplied and used by registered dental practitioners as part of their dental practise", under provisions "formalised in all state and territory poisons legislation".

What does Schedule 10 mean?

It "lists substances of such danger to health as to warrant prohibition of their sale, supply and use other than in specified exempt circumstances". Use by a registered dental practitioner in practice is one of those circumstances.

How much stronger is a clinic product?

"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 an examination actually required?

The ADA's position is yes: whitening "should only be performed if the treatment can be justified, and after a comprehensive dental examination has been conducted by a Dental Practitioner".

Why does the examination matter so much?

Because some discolouration will not respond. "Tooth decay, fillings, crowns, bridges, veneers, false teeth and some types of discolouration do not whiten", and the Department's first step in any cosmetic plan is to "find out what is causing the unsatisfactory appearance of your teeth".

What if just one tooth is dark after root canal treatment?

There is a specific technique for that. "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."

Does my mouth have to be healthy first?

Yes. "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."

What should the appointment cover?

The Department's list is to "treat any disease first", "find out what is causing the unsatisfactory appearance of your teeth", "talk about the range of treatment options", and "work out a realistic plan that suits you".

What should I ask?

"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."

Is a whitening laser specially regulated in Victoria?

Yes. All registered practitioners with appropriate training may use Class 4 lasers, "but 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". The relevant standard is "AS/NZS 4173:2018, Safe use of lasers and intense light sources in health care".

Are practitioners themselves bound by anything?

Yes. The ADA records that in August 2021 the Dental Board of Australia published guidance for registered dental practitioners on using and supplying teeth whitening products, which "cites the Poisons Standard, Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) advertising requirements, and Australian Consumer Law", and states that "You can only use teeth whitening products in line with your training and the law".

Does having it done professionally avoid the side effects?

No. Whitening "commonly causes temporary tooth sensitivity", gel overflow "can cause temporary gum irritation", and "whitening is not permanent". What changes is that someone assessed whether those are acceptable for your teeth first.

Related services and further reading

Teeth whitening

Cosmetic dentistry

Dental check-ups

Dental hygiene

Teeth whitening: what colour should my teeth be, and is it safe to whiten them?

All about teeth whitening

Risks involved with teeth whitening

How long does teeth whitening last?

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 your practice page, or call 13 13 16
Hours	Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm, Saturday mornings, Sunday closed

This article is general in nature and does not replace advice from a registered dental practitioner who has examined you. Results, recovery times and potential risks vary for each individual. Seek advice from a qualified, AHPRA-registered practitioner before proceeding.

Why see a dentist before whitening my teeth?

A dentist can diagnose and treat conditions such as active gum disease or cavities first, because whitening gel can worsen them. At Core Dental we also recommend a check and clean to remove plaque and tartar that may cause staining.

Does whitening work on veneers, crowns and root-treated teeth?

Whitening may not be effective on teeth with veneers, crowns or root canal treatment, because restorations do not change colour. Core Dental dentists can assess previous work and suggest suitable cosmetic options.

Can whitening burn the gums?

Whitening gel applied incorrectly to the gums may cause superficial soft tissue burns. In a dental setting the Core Dental team protects the soft tissues, which may be overlooked in under-regulated mobile services.

Why can abrasive whitening toothpastes damage teeth?

Activated charcoal and whitening toothpastes use abrasives that can wear enamel over time, exposing yellower dentine and increasing sensitivity. Core Dental dentists can advise on safer options for your teeth.

What whitening options does Core Dental offer?

Core Dental offers in-chair Zoom whitening and take-home whitening with custom trays made by your dentist, after an examination. Suitability and results vary, so our team will explain what to expect for your teeth.

How does take-home whitening work?

Your dentist makes custom trays that fit your teeth and protect your gums, and you apply a whitening solution at home, wearing the trays for a set time each day. Results build gradually over about a week or so.

What affects whitening results?

Your starting tooth shade and habits such as smoking, alcohol and pigmented food and drinks like coffee and tea can affect results. Core Dental dentists will discuss these with you before treatment.

How do I book teeth whitening at Core Dental?

Call 13 13 16 or book online through coredental.com.au. Core Dental clinics are open Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm and Saturday mornings, and we quote before treatment starts.