

# TOOTH WHITENING AT HOME

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR HOME BLEACHING

At the Half Moon Dental Centre we normally use 10% Carbamide Peroxide to achieve the bleaching effect. In the following instructions, we will refer to this as "bleach".

### Daytime method

1. Clean your teeth and floss. This opens more tooth surface up to the bleach
2. Place bleaching gel inside the bleaching trays. You don't need to use very much, just enough to cover the front surfaces of the teeth. ½ a tube should be enough for top and bottom trays.
3. Insert the bleaching trays into your mouth and gently press into place. Check in a mirror that the gel has spread over all the front surfaces of your teeth.
4. If any excess bleaching gel comes out from the trays, wipe it away with a tissue.
5. The bleaching usually causes some foaming, which you may spit out.
6. It is desirable to avoid swallowing excess bleach, although the bleach is not harmful. Do not be concerned if you do swallow a small amount.
7. 2 hours is the recommended minimum time period to have the bleach in contact with your teeth. This may be increased up to 6 hours if it is convenient. You may add more bleach during this period with no ill effects.

### Overnight Method

1. Clean your teeth and floss.
2. Squirt bleaching gel into the tray. Use just enough to make sure all the front surfaces of the teeth are covered. You can check this in the mirror.
3. Wipe off any excess bleach from the gums with a tissue.
4. Wear the bleaching trays overnight.
5. Remove trays in the morning and brush away any excess of the sticky bleaching gel.
6. Gently clean the bleaching tray with cold water and a toothbrush. The bleaching agent is anti-bacterial (due to its oxygen releasing action) and is used to kill the bacteria which cause gum disease.

### General Notes

1. In a survey of 7000 U.S. dentists, it was noted that some form of sensitivity occurred in 23% of patients using the *overnight* method. This sensitivity took the form of either increased sensation of hot and cold or a mild dull ache lasting a few hours after the bleaching session. Also some patients suffered from gum irritation. We design the bleaching trays so they just cover the teeth to avoid gum coverage and minimise this side-effect. If you suffer from either of these side-effects, shorten the bleaching cycle to about 2 hours. In addition, you may use a fluoride mouthwash such as Fluorigard Daily. Alternatively, you could put some Sensodyne in the bleaching trays overnight. This reaction to bleaching process is short term and will subside once the bleaching is completed. If the symptoms subside then you may gradually increase the bleaching cycle length. If the symptoms persist, contact your dentist and stop bleaching.
2. Some patients find their teeth bleach in an uneven manner and take on a chalky or milky appearance. This will revert to a normal translucent appearance 2-3 week after the bleaching ceases.
3. The chewing tips (incisal edges) tend to bleach more quickly and effectively than the part close to the gum-line. You need to persist to achieve lightening of the neck of the tooth.

4. Bleaching only works on natural tooth substance so white fillings and crowns or veneers will not change colour. As the bleach works, the contrast in colour between natural tooth and non-natural tooth substance will increase. Depending on the size, number and extent of these restorations, you made need to consider replacing them.
5. It has been shown that longer bleaching sessions are more effective than short ones. The combined effects of 8 x 1 hour sessions are less than 1 x 8 hour session.
6. The enclosed leaflet gives information on the chemistry of the bleach but additional information is available on the internet or by asking your dentist.
7. **Do not discard your bleaching trays or models when you have completed the course.** You should keep the trays so that you can “top up” the bleaching effect in the future. Please note, “topping up” the effect is not harmful and is usually rapid in action. Keep the models in case you lose or damage the trays as we can make a duplicate set easily and less expensively.
8. Do not put your bleaching trays in very hot water as they will permanently distort. Avoid exposing the bleaching temperature to high temperatures (avoid leaving in your car) as the carbamide peroxide gel will degrade much more quickly and lose its effectiveness. We recommend keeping the gel in the fridge (not freezer) where it will last for up to 2 years.

### Frequently Asked Questions

1. **“Does tooth lightening work as effectively on all teeth types?”**  
No. Bleaching is most effective on teeth that have changed with age. It is much less effective with grey shades of teeth most usually as a result of tetracycline anti-biotic or amalgam fillings. Tetracycline can respond to bleaching, but the result is not predictable and can take up to 6 months to achieve. Alternatives such as veneers are often preferred.
2. **“Will tooth whitening lighten all the teeth evenly?”**  
As a broad generalisation, the most discoloured tend to lighten the most. Occasionally the teeth can exhibit irregular spotting of more intense whitening and in all but the rarest of cases does this effect not disappear with continued bleaching. Research from the University of Alabama Periodontal Department found that all the tooth surface did not have to be in contact with the gel for all of the tooth to lighten, so it is important to persist with the full tray bleaching method.
3. **“Do over-the-counter” bleaching kits work as effectively?”**  
In truth, we have never yet had a patient who has been satisfied with a commercially available product sold over-the-counter. The primary reason is that the effective strength of the bleaching solution sold is below that which is clinically effective. Correct strength solutions can only be prescribed by dentists. The same applies to the whitening toothpastes which are only in contact with your teeth for relatively short periods.
4. **“I’ve heard of ‘Power Bleaching’. What is this and do you do it at the Half Moon Dental Centre?”**  
Power bleaching involves the use of a very concentrated solution of Carbamide Peroxide (40%+) and a method of heating the gel – usually with a heating light source. The promotional material associated with this method often shows very dramatic and instantaneous results. In fact, a large amount of this whitening is caused by desiccation of the tooth tissues – water is drawn out of the teeth. This can result in quite severe sensitivity after it is done not to mention the fact that in the following weeks water is drawn back into the tooth and the bleaching effect fades. Often this form of bleaching is combined with the method we use. The costs are usually much higher. We do not feel comfortable, at this time, to offer this treatment option but if you are determined to “Power Bleach” we would advise you to consult the internet for a supplier.