

LIGHTEN UP!

Dr. Michael Thompson Talks About the Best Whitening Options for Your Teeth

There is nothing like starting the day with a strong cup of Joe and finishing it with a glass or two of red wine.

Your teeth, however, would disagree.

"There are four main reasons your teeth are darker or dimmer than other people's – genetics, age, developmental contributors and diet," said Dr. Michael Thompson of Kierland Dental Center. "A diet of brown coffee and red wine stains the invisible film on teeth causing external darkening."

But those stains are on the surface and can be cleaned off at home or at your dentist's office each visit, every visit. When it comes to getting your teeth pearly white for the long haul, however, you need to change the internal color with dental bleaching.

"Many over-the-counter products state can get your teeth whiter, but do not in any way actually alter the color of your teeth," said Dr. Thompson. "They say they will get your teeth *THEIR* whitest, but not pearly white."

According to Dr. Thompson, who is also a past president of the Arizona Dental Association, internal stains, which come from age, smoking and long-term dietary stains can some-

times be lightened with at-home whitening strips and gels. These products, which must be purchased and used on a regular basis over a lifetime to diminish internal stains, are usually less effective and always a more expensive solution since they require continuous use.

If one's teeth are naturally darker, which can be due to genetics or environmental factors including the use of certain antibiotics as a child or even excess fluoride in water, at-home strips are too mild to provide a full whitening effect.

Because of the predictable success of prescription strength dental bleaching, it is no surprise that over the past two decades, the American Dental Association reports that teeth whitening and bleaching has become one of the most popular esthetic dental treatments provided by dentists.

In cases where one wants to seriously change the color of his/her teeth, there are two options:

DENTIST SUPERVISED AT-HOME SYSTEMS

This process requires a dental exam prior in order to evaluate, diagnose and treat any pressing oral health conditions and advise on the most effective treatment courses for your mouth. After any general issues are addressed, a dentist will obtain molds of the patient's upper and lower jaw and create custom trays that can be used with professional-strength, prescription whitening gels at home under a dentist's guidance.

"This option is certainly convenient and is guaranteed to put bleach in contact with all areas of teeth, as the trays are custom to the individual," said Dr. Thompson. "Trays last a lifetime as teeth do not move, which makes them the least costly option if you want

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white teeth the rest of your life."

The entire process costs about \$200-\$500 and takes anywhere from three weeks to three months, depending on the depth of staining and tooth coloration. The trays generally need to be worn for one hour per day over a three-week treatment period. It is also important to note that this process can cause mild sensitivity and will not be able to effectively lighten antibiotic-stained teeth or severely nicotine-stained teeth.

And, bleaching will not change the color of dental restorations. So if you get the great result you want at home, you may end up having to pay thousands for new dental work to match your new color.

IN-OFFICE POWER WHITENING

By far, the most effective way to completely alter one's overall appearance is to invest in an in-office whitening program. The bleaches that are approved for use by dentists are exponentially stronger than any other option and based primarily on either hydrogen peroxide or carbamide peroxide. They are so strong, in fact, that the chemicals will burn the gums and lips if anyone other than a well-trained professional handles them.

Like with the at-home option, this treatment always begins with a comprehensive oral examination. If cracks, leaking restorations or cavities are found, then bleaching will definitely cause severe sensitivity on those teeth. If recession has



Dr. Michael Thompson of
Kierland Dental Center

exposed roots or wear has exposed dentin on the biting surfaces, then protective coatings need to be placed during the bleaching process to prevent sore teeth. Once corrective measures are in place it is safe to proceed and the risk of sensitivity is minimal.

The actual initial bleaching, which costs about \$300, can usually be done in one session, which lasts about 90

minutes and will cause some temporary tooth and/or gum sensitivity. Often, dentists will also provide at-home trays at little or no cost, so you can follow-up the process with the mild, prescription strength bleach in custom made trays at home. To maintain that great result, Dr. Thompson recommends touch-up bleaching after each dental cleaning and he gives each of his patients a free touch up supply of dental bleach following their cleanings.

For more information, please visit www.azcosmeticdentistry.com ■