

COVID-19 pandemic

Getting your dental health back on track

Caring for your teeth

October 2020

Part 2

During these challenging times, many of us may have put health care on the backburner. Stay at home and business restrictions have made it more difficult to access care when you need it. There are a few things to keep in mind when it comes to your dental care.

Teeth whitening and straightening - Can I do it at home?

Several companies advertise products on television and social media, promoting them as safe for use at home. There are important factors to consider before using these products.

Teeth whitening

Teeth whitening can be done in a dental practice or with a home-whitening kit under the supervision of a dentist. Do It Yourself (DIY) teeth whitening products can also be purchased online from suppliers within Australia and overseas.

- Is DIY home whitening right for you?
Teeth that have decay, cavities or broken or worn-down fillings are not suitable for whitening. The whitening gel can potentially damage these teeth and make their condition worse. Heavy build-up of plaque and calculus (hardened plaque) on teeth will make the whitening gel less effective by creating a barrier on the tooth surface.

Certain types of tooth stains and discolouration cannot be fixed with whitening products.

A comprehensive dental check-up by a qualified dental practitioner will determine whether whitening is suitable for your teeth, and they can clean your teeth before starting. Using DIY whitening without a dentist's supervision may aggravate existing issues or may not be effective at all.

- What do DIY home whitening products actually contain?

Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) approved teeth whitening products contain either hydrogen peroxide or carbamide peroxide. Both work in a similar way by breaking down into water and oxygen. DIY home whitening kits contain low concentrations of these ingredients which can make them less effective.

Under Australian law and Dental Board of Australia regulations only dentists can use high concentrations of these ingredients at a dental practice. High concentration whitening products are illegal for home use and can cause harm if used unsupervised.

If whitening gels are applied incorrectly, they can lead to burns to the gums and soft tissues inside the mouth. Using these gels for longer than recommended can also damage teeth leading to sensitivity or more serious nerve damage.



An ADAVB Oral Health
Committee initiative

References available on request.

Contact ask@adavb.org


V I C T O R I A

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Be careful of whitening products containing sodium perborate or sodium chlorite which have not been TGA approved for home use. Other types of products containing charcoal are more likely to have an abrasive effect than a whitening effect on teeth.

- Are your whitening trays custom-made?
When whitening teeth at home, it is important that the trays supplied fit your teeth precisely to prevent the whitening gel from overflowing onto the gums or elsewhere in the mouth which can cause a chemical burn.
- What happens if I get a chemical burn from DIY whitening gel?
If the burn is severe and causing pain, visit your dentist or doctor for advice as soon as possible. Even mild chemical burns may require a dentist or doctor to check for harm to your gums or other areas of the mouth.

Teeth straightening (orthodontics)

- Who is overseeing your treatment?
Being treated and closely overseen by a qualified dentist or orthodontist ensures you will get the best result. They will monitor your progress during treatment and address any potential problems and other issues such as tooth decay or gum disease. 'Before' and 'after' photos in advertisements for products sent to you at home might seem like crowded teeth have dramatically improved. While the teeth might seem straighter in the 'after' photo, the teeth may move back to their original position or the upper and lower teeth may not fit together properly.



Visit orthodonticsaustralia.org.au for more information.

Don't delay your dental care. Visit your regular dentist or findadentist.adavb.org to find a dentist near you.

Find a public dental service at dhsv.org.au/public-dental-services.



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