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What Price Beauty: The Cost of Teeth-Whitening

By Grace Bastidas – [Article Link](#) - mainstreet.com

Want whiter, brighter teeth? Of course, you do. According to the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry, most Americans believe a smile is a vital social asset that helps you attract the opposite sex and climb the ladder to success. No wonder teeth whitening has grown into a billion dollar business.



“You just have to be careful,” advises Terry S. Shapiro, DMD, who practices restorative and cosmetic dentistry in Long Island, NY. “Even if it’s over the counter, you should talk to your dentist first,” she says. “But if your teeth and gums are in good health, I’d say ‘yeah, give it a try.’”

With dozens of options, from supermarket toothpastes to dentist-applied gels, there’s a teeth whitening technique for every lifestyle and budget. But not all of them deliver the same results.

In-Office Power Bleaching

Estimated cost: \$500

Those who demand instant-gratification can opt for a lunchtime makeover at the dentist’s office. The procedure is seemingly simple: After protecting your lips and gums, the doctor applies a hydrogen peroxide-based gel on your teeth and uses a high-intensity light to break up stains and impurities within the enamel. Expect to sit in a chair for up to an hour and see results almost immediately.

“It will get teeth between eight to 10 shades lighter,” says Debra Glassman, DMD, a New York City dentist who uses the Zoom! Chairside Whitening method. But not everyone agrees that the quickest approach is always the best. “The formulation of the bleach is too strong,” says Dr. Shapiro. “Many patients come in and say it leads to sensitivity.”

Professional At-Home Trays

Estimated cost: \$250

Folks who prefer to ease into things can take a more conservative approach with an at-home system. “It gives you more control,” says Dr. Shapiro. “You can bleach individual teeth since most people don’t have a uniform shade of teeth.” Here’s how it works: The dentist provides custom-fitted mouth trays and bleaching gel that is combined by the patient and worn for four hours a day during a period of one to two weeks. The bleaching gel is offered in a range of strengths, so you can ease up the intensity.

“Slow and steady will get you there, but you have to stick with it,” says Dr. Glassman, who finds that some people don’t have the patience for this technique.

Over-the-Counter Kits

Estimated cost: \$5–\$50

Shoppers interested in brightening their smiles without denting their wallets can buy whitening strips and toothpastes at the drugstore. Over-the-counter options range from pre-filled trays to stick-on and dissolving strips, all of which have a weaker peroxide concentration than those offered from a dentist, and are thus less effective. “Still, if you use it as the directions tell you, they will definitely whiten teeth,” says Dr. Glassman. But be warned: “If you have long teeth like Julia Roberts, the strips may not cover the tooth and you’ll end up with stripes. That’s a consequence of using a mass product that isn’t individually molded.”

Dr. Shapiro says over-the-counter kits are futile, regardless of tooth size. “Ultimately it doesn’t work at all,” says Dr. Shapiro. “You won’t get more than one shade lighter, and it won’t last.” Plus, if you overuse these products hoping for whiter teeth with each packet, “you’re going to damage your teeth,” says Dr. Glassman.

And when it comes to whitening toothpaste, it’s more about “upkeep,” adds Dr. Glassman. “If you have a glass of red wine, you want to brush with a whitening toothpaste,” she says. Same goes for coffee, grape juice, marinara sauce, beetroot, and a long list of colorful foods that are known to stain even the pearllest of teeth.