

Dos and Don'ts: Teeth Whitening

Written by Madelyn Steckbeck

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Unfortunately, as we age our teeth naturally start to yellow. There are plenty of ways to whiten your teeth, but not all of them are safe. Prevent yellowing safely with whitening dos and don'ts from Dr. Whitney Wright, founding partner and orthodontist at Valley-based [Risas Dental and Braces](#).

AFM: What are some of your favorite home remedies for whitening and how do they compare to professional-grade whitening?

WW: I'm a big believer in preventative care, so in terms of home remedies for whitening, I like to think avoiding things like red wine and coffee keeps my teeth stain-free, thus a whiter and brighter smile. Brushing with baking soda mixed with water is also something I do ever so often. They work just as well as professional-grade whitening, but take longer to show results.

AFM: Are there any natural remedies that have been said to help whiten but in fact do not help?

WW: Not so much that they don't help but more so that they shouldn't be used long term or left on for extended periods of time. Strawberries, for example, are acidic fruits and too much can start to weigh on the enamel of your teeth. Remedies like these are more 'quick fixes' than anything long term.

AFM: How do you whiten with strawberries?

WW: You can mash up strawberries into almost a jamlike substance and use a toothbrush to apply to your teeth.

AFM: For a whiter smile, is flossing just as important as brushing?

WW: Absolutely. Brushing only cleans the surface, and if you're brushing properly should also help remove some items in between the teeth. Flossing really helps remove those hard-to-reach plaque buildup and food particles. Flossing daily keeps all of that from building up.

AFM: What are some of the most dangerous ways to whiten?

WW: Although bleaching is the most used practice for whitening teeth, overuse of the chemical is what makes it dangerous. Because of the great results that whitening treatments with bleach show, people want more of it to keep up with that perfection. In reality you shouldn't have a bleaching treatment done more than once or twice a year to prevent any damage to your enamel. People are known to develop teeth sensitivity issues as well when they go overboard with bleaching.

AFM: Can too much whitening be harmful to your dental health and how?

WW: Too much of anything can be harmful. Whitening excessively may damage the protective layer of your teeth known as the enamel

AFM: Are whitening strips dangerous?

WW: Yes and no. When used as instructed and not excessively, they're OK to use. After doing a whitening treatment such as whitening strips, it's important to take time off from doing them. Do the treatment as directed and then take a few weeks or months off.

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AFM: The BrightWhite Smile Teeth whitening light has become increasingly popular. Would you recommend this to a patient?

WW: Although it is increasing in popularity, it doesn't do much in regards to making teeth any whiter. It is the bleaching chemicals that remove stains; the light only slightly warms the teeth to attempt to speed up the process. Research has been shown that the light is ultimately ineffective and not needed for a great result.

AFM: What whitening toothpaste or mouthwash would you recommend to a patient?

WW: All of the Optic White products by Colgate I'm a fan of. Beyond just whitening the surface of the teeth, they work to remove long-term stains.

AFM: What foods should one stay away from for a whiter smile?

WW: Acidic foods such as citrus fruits are harsh on your enamel so it's best not to go overboard. Red sauces, berries, red wine, coffee, tea, etc. all have the potential to stain your teeth. Consuming drinks through a straw can help prevent staining.

AFM: What is a good age to start whitening?

WW: I would say when you're old enough to know how to make smart decisions with your whitening. You should fully understand how different whitening treatments can affect people differently before jumping into one treatment or another. I wouldn't necessarily put an exact number on it, but I wouldn't let my children whiten until age 14.

AFM: How does whitening affect one's sense of self and confidence?

WW: I believe first impressions start with a smile. When you're proud of your teeth, smiles come easily. When you're not happy with your teeth you tend to not show them off. Happy people radiate confidence. If white teeth will help you feel confident in your smile, then by all means explore your options to get there. At Risas Dental & Braces we believe everyone deserves to be happy and confident in their smile- regardless what treatment is needed to get you there. We can help.