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1-800-994-9662

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seal of acceptance, it is good for your oral health. Beyond that, choosing toothpastes is a personal choice.

- Mouthwashes claim to freshen your breath. But they really only mask breath odor for a few hours. If you always need to use a mouthwash to hide bad breath, see your dentist.

Q: I'm not happy with the stains on my teeth. How can I safely whiten them?

A: Safe whitening options vary in price and how well they work:

- **Chairside bleaching or "power bleaching."** In your dentist's office, he or she applies a gel or rubber shield to protect your gums and oral tissues. Then bleach is put on your teeth. Ask if the bleaching agents have the ADA seal. A special light or a laser may be used to help the bleach work better. But no products that use lasers are accepted right now by the ADA. With this method you may have to go for more than one visit. You will see results right away (about five shades brighter). It works well on a range of stains.
- **Dentist-dispensed and over-the-counter bleaching products.** These products are for home use. They contain peroxide(s), which bleach the tooth enamel. Most come in a gel and are placed in a mouth guard or tray that fits inside your mouth. How long you use them depends on the results you're looking for and if you are sensitive to the bleach. Some products are used twice a day for 2 weeks, and others are used overnight for 1 to 2 weeks. They help many types of staining.

Your teeth turn about six shades brighter with long-lasting results. But only the dentist-dispensed solutions have the ADA seal.

- **Over-the-counter whitening products.** These products are for home use and include whitening strips, paint-on products, gels, and trays. They have a low amount of peroxide. You wear some during the day and apply some at night before bedtime. They can help staining due to age and certain foods. Your teeth turn about two shades brighter for up to 6 months. For better results, have a cleaning at the dentist before you use these products. These gels and trays do not have the ADA seal.
- **Whitening toothpastes.** All toothpastes help remove surface stain through mild abrasives. "Whitening" toothpastes that have the ADA seal have special polishing agents that remove even more stains. Unlike bleaches, these products do not change the actual color of teeth. They help surface stains only. You might see short-term results that are one to two shades brighter.

Products used to whiten teeth can make teeth more sensitive. They can also bother your gums. These side effects most often go away after you stop using the product.

Before using whitening products, talk with your dentist. He or she can help you decide which method is best for the type of stains on your teeth. Not all products work on all people. Options offered by your dentist can be expensive, so ask your dentist to fully explain the results you can really expect. Keep



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in mind that whitening your teeth does not make your mouth any healthier.

Q: What small, easy steps can I take to have a healthy smile?

A: 1. Brush your teeth at least twice each day with fluoride toothpaste. Aim for first thing in the morning and before going to bed. Once a day, use floss or an interdental cleaner to clean food your toothbrush missed.

Make sure you:

- Drink water that contains added fluoride if you can. Fluoride protects against dental decay. Most public water systems in the United States have added fluoride. Check with your community's water or health department to find out if there is fluoride in your water. You also may want to use a fluoride mouth rinse, along with brushing and flossing, to help prevent tooth decay.
- Gently brush all sides of your teeth with a soft-bristled brush. Round and short back-and-forth strokes work best.
- Take time to brush along the gum line, and lightly brush your tongue to help remove plaque and food.
- Ask your dentist or dental hygienist to show you the best way to floss your teeth.
- Change your toothbrush every 3 months, or earlier if the toothbrush looks worn or the bristles spread out. A new toothbrush removes more plaque.
- If you wear dentures, be sure to remove them at night and clean

them before putting them back in the next morning.

2. Have a healthy lifestyle.

- Eat healthy meals. Cut down on tooth decay by brushing after meals. Avoid snacking on sugary or starchy foods between meals.
- Don't smoke. It raises your risk of gum disease, oral and throat cancers, and oral fungal infections. It also affects the color of your teeth and the smell of your breath.
- Limit alcohol use to one drink per day for women. Heavy alcohol use raises your risk of oral and throat cancers. Using alcohol and tobacco together raises your risk of oral cancers more than using one alone.
- Limit how much of soda you drink. Even diet soda contains acids that can erode tooth enamel.

3. Get regular checkups.

- Have an oral exam once or twice a year. Your dentist may recommend more or fewer visits depending on your oral health. At most routine visits, the dentist and a dental hygienist will treat you. During regular checkups, dentists look for signs of diseases, infections, problems, injuries, and oral cancer.
- See your dentist right away if
 - your gums bleed often
 - you see any red or white patches on the gums, tongue, or floor of the mouth
 - you have mouth or jaw pain that won't go away
 - you have sores that do not heal within 2 weeks

