

## **Pediatric Teeth Whitening**

Most people associate teeth whitening with adults. However, in this day and age, children and young adults are requesting teeth whitening procedures more and more often. Children and young adults don't like negative attention because of their teeth any more than adults do. And for children, the low self-esteem and possible teasing from other children, can have a huge impact. When kids have a darker tooth, for whatever reason, they don't want to be told they have to wait for it to fall out on its own or worse yet, that their permanent adult tooth will always be discolored. They want to have a brilliant smile too.

### **Reasons Kids Might Want or Need their Teeth Whitened**

There are actual several reasons a child might have a tooth, or teeth, that is a different color from the rest of their teeth.

- They grow in that way. Believe it or not, both baby teeth and adult teeth can grow in with enamel that is not fully or properly formed. This is permanent and without the enamel to protect the tooth, some parts are left to be impacted by whatever your child is eating and drinking. This means that no matter how much they brush and floss, there will probably be a noticeable difference in color between the enameled part of the tooth and the non-enameled part of the tooth.
- Injury to the mouth. Mouth injuries in children are fairly common. When something hits the mouth or when the child falls and the brunt of the impact is on the mouth, it can kill a tooth's root, causing it to become gray or even black. If this is a baby tooth, your pediatric dentist in JC may well pull it. If it's an adult tooth, then your pediatric dentist may look to other procedures and treatments to make the tooth more aesthetically pleasing.
- Some antibiotics and other drugs can cause tooth discoloration and staining.
- If there has ever been an infection of the tooth, sometimes, that can leave stains behind.
- If your child has had braces removed recently, there may be white spots where the brackets used to be. Usually, this fades after several cleanings, which is assisted by how much your child brushes their teeth. Some teens, however, don't want to wait months for the color difference to fade and instead prefer to have teeth whitening done within a few weeks of having their braces removed.
- The foods and beverages your child is consuming can also lead to discoloration that is hard to remove at home.
- If your child is not brushing and flossing their teeth regularly, this will lead to a yellowing of the teeth.
- Swallowing too much fluoride while your child's teeth are still forming can result in a yellowing of the teeth as well, which is irreversible and you will not be able to correct this at home.

### **Choices in Pediatric Teeth Whitening**

Most pediatric dentists are going to recommend that you wait until all your child's adult teeth are in before trying whitening. Otherwise, baby teeth will be nice and white while new adult teeth will not match in color, defeating the purpose of whitening in the first place. Most children have all their adult teeth by about age 12. Once you decide to whiten your child's teeth, whitening done by a professional is usually recommended, for several reasons:

- If you just run to the store and get a tooth whitening kit, you may never know what caused the discoloration in the first place. Going to a pediatric dentist in JC means your child can have a professional examination where the dentist can tell you what the cause of the problem is and the best course of action, including stain prevention.
- Teeth whitening typically takes several treatments, as when using trays with whitening treatment in them or whitening strips. If your pediatric dentist in JC does the treatments, you are guaranteed they will be done and done properly. Children and young adults are notorious for their lack of follow through and completing treatments.
- Some whitening agents can be fine for your teeth but a little harsh on soft sensitive gums. Kids would probably be less than careful about keeping the whitening product away from their gums and so for this reason, a professional who knows what they are doing is probably best for gum health.
- Professional whitening treatments also show results sooner than at over the counter treatments.

### **The Waiting Game**

"Are we there yet?" is a common refrain among kids and getting their teeth whitened will be no exception. Before you choose and begin a treatment, your pediatric dentist may recommend that your child brush with a tooth desensitizing toothpaste for a few weeks. Most of the treatments have the side effect of tooth sensitivity and brushing with a desensitizing toothpaste ahead of time can minimize that side effect.

There are three basic options for whitening:

- **In-Office Vital Bleaching.** This is the most expensive procedure with the fastest results. Be aware that most insurance companies do not cover bleaching treatments. Results are immediate. Here is what your child can expect:
  - The pediatric dentist will put something over their gums, usually made of rubber or gel, so that the whitening product doesn't get on their gums.
  - Second, the dentist will put the bleaching agent directly on the teeth.
  - Lastly, a special heat or light laser will be used on the teeth to speed up the bleaching process.

- **Overnight Vital Bleaching.** This treatment is not actually overnight, but it is a system prepped by your dentist for your child to take home and use with minimal fuss.
  - The dentist will take an impression of your child's teeth and create a clear plastic tray that perfectly fit their mouth. If your child is using modern braces that are a series of step-up trays that change every few weeks, your dentist may let you use those trays, already fitted to your mouth, for the whitening process. These trays are specially made to keep the whitening agent away from the gums.
  - You will take home a gel with a small dispensing tip in a tube. This gel will be put into the tray and the tray worn for about 30 minutes, twice daily. Treatment time is usually about two weeks. Your child's teeth will continue to whiten as time goes on, after treatment is finished, as long as they keep up with brushing their teeth.
  - This process means white teeth for six to 12 months, sometimes longer.
  - As with all tooth whitening, this causes tooth sensitivity in 55 to 75% of cases.
- **Whitening Strips.** This is the cheapest option and for some, the only option for whitening due strictly to cost. These over the counter strips will require more adult supervision to make sure the strips are being put on properly and used according to the directions. Your pediatric dentist will probably have certain brands they can recommend to you.