

# **BLEACHOREXIA**

**Listen up, teeth whitening junkies: Dentists say there's a right and a wrong way to bleach your teeth---and going overboard could harm your health.**

Is the quest to getting your pearly whites pearlier driving you mad? Dental health professionals have a new diagnosis for your condition---and it's called BLEACHOREXIA.

Bleachorexia is the term that these specialists have coined to describe and addictive obsession with teeth whitening. People can become addicted to bleaching their teeth to the point that it's affecting their dental health.

Your teeth become naturally stained over time from products like coffee, tea, and tobacco. Stains may also come from red wine, sodas and certain types of antibiotics or too much fluoride.

So how do whitening products work? Teeth whitening systems rely on the bleaching agent peroxide. Peroxide works best on yellow-colored teeth, not as well on brown teeth, and not well at all on gray-colored teeth. Teeth discolored by fluoride or antibiotics also tend to be resistant to bleaching.

## **Teeth Whitening Systems**

The American Dental Association (ADA) has approved the following bleaching products.

**\*In-office teeth bleaching.** This procedure involves applying a protective gel of rubber shield to your gums, and then applying a bleaching agent to your teeth. Special lights may be used to speed up the process.

**\*At-home bleaching.** Your dentist can supply you with a kit to use at home that includes a bleaching solution in gel form and a custom-made mouth guard to hold the gel in place. Over-the-counter kits are also available, but they are not ADA approved.

**\*Teeth Whitening Toothpastes.** If you are hoping for a super white smile that comes from super whitening toothpaste, you may be waiting a long time. ADA-approved whitening toothpastes only whiten your teeth by keeping them cleaner. They do not actually bleach your teeth.

Although ADA-approved systems are safe as long as you follow instructions, bleaching your teeth excessively can actually cause them to get translucent, making them look even less white.

### **Precautions**

Hypersensitivity. Teeth bleaching can make your teeth more sensitive. Some people get extremely sensitive, and some can't even do the procedures if too sensitive. The hypersensitivity usually goes away very rapidly, but some take a little longer for that sensitivity to disappear.

Oral Irritation. Your gums, palate and throat can become sensitive and irritated from the bleach, and some people even get nauseous from the bleaching gel. These side effects also subside after you stop using the bleach.

Tooth Enamel Erosion. If you use a bleaching kit for too long, or bleach too frequently, it is possible to wear away the outer coating of your teeth. This is just one more reason to stick with the ADA-approved teeth whitening systems under the watchful eye of a dental health professional.

Reported by Chris Iliades, M.D. on AOL September 19, 2011