

Grin and bare it
 Don't let lax brushing habits cause a stain relapse.



Brighten your bite Everything you need to know for a whiter smile. (Hint: It takes more than bleaching.) By Shannan Rouss

Maintenance is rarely anyone's strong suit: You clean your kitchen spick and span, but by week's end, dishes are piled high; you start an exercise program but bail after a month; you whiten your teeth, but two months of lattes later, they've lost their luster. If you're starting with an untarnished set of ivories (whether they're nice and bright naturally or by way of bleaching), adopt these stay-white smile strategies.

Act fast. The sooner you get to stains, the less likely they are to stick. "The tannins and polyphenols in foods such as coffee, tea, marinara sauce and red wine adhere to the surface of your tooth in under an hour," cautions Jonathan Levine, D.D.S.,

founder of GoSmile, a dental-products company in New York City. Combined with plaque, which can trap dark pigments and harden into tartar in 8 to 24 hours, stains will become increasingly tougher to tackle over time, so break out the toothbrush as soon as possible after eating culprit foods.

Chew on this No brush? No biggie. In a pinch, any gum that's sugar-free (an absolute must for dodging tooth decay) can help keep your pearly whites gleaming. "Both whitening and regular gums work on the same principle—saliva flows over your teeth, flushing away stains," says Lana Rozenberg, D.D.S., founder of the Dental Day Spa in New York City.

Even rinsing with a swig of water or chomping on some crudités does the trick; heavy chewing generates saliva. But make sure you stick with nonsugary options. Sorry, trick-or-treaters, that means caramel chews and nougats don't count.

Make fluoride your friend. Don't count on a whitening toothpaste alone to safeguard your smile; it doesn't have a high enough concentration of peroxide or stay in contact with teeth long enough, according to Debra Glassman, D.D.S., a cosmetic dentist in New York City. Abrasive ingredients like silica or baking soda in whitening pastes gently polish away surface stains caused by foods, but a whitening toothpaste that also contains fluoride is your best bet; it helps strengthen the tooth's enamel, which is more porous after bleaching. This will also soothe sensitivity and prevent stains and plaque from ruining your smile, Dr. Glassman says.

Brush up on brushing. While most of us probably abide by the twice-a-day mandate, a cursory 30-second cleaning isn't really cutting it to rid teeth of plaque or bacteria that stain enamel. You actually need to brush for a full two minutes—and cover the entire terrain. "Think of your mouth as divided into quadrants," Dr. Levine suggests. Then brush each one (upper right, lower right, upper left, lower left) for approximately 30 seconds. But be careful not to overdo it: Scrubbing teeth too vigorously and for too long, especially if you use a hard-bristled brush, can wear away the enamel. Instead, opt for a soft-bristled brush (replace it every three or four months), and keep an eye on the clock. You'll be able to give all your teeth equal attention, so choppers stay spotless. Now, if only keeping the kitchen clean were this easy.

94% of Americans polled said they notice a person's smile during a first encounter. People are less likely to notice your eyes or body.



Top tooth picks

Get the goods that will make your smile sparkle.

1. **Sonicare Elite 7300, \$120** An electric toothbrush with a timer helps you hit the two-minute mark. It beeps every 30 seconds so you can methodically work through your mouth.
2. **GoSmile Daily Compact, \$38 for 7** Tote around the tiny vials, which contain a low dose of stain-fighting hydrogen peroxide. Whip out one to polish teeth once a day.
3. **Crest Whitestrips Premium, \$35** Kick-start a whitening regimen with hydrogen-peroxide-coated strips that conform to your teeth. Wear twice a day for a whiter smile in a week.
4. **Rembrandt Whitening Wand, \$15** It's a lip gloss look-alike with a peroxide formula for brightening your smile. Small and sleek, it tucks discreetly into your pocket or purse.
5. **Oral-B Brush-Ups, \$3 for 12** Left your toothbrush and toothpaste by the bathroom sink? Slip one of these mint-flavored wipes on your finger and clean teeth.
6. **Arm & Hammer Enamel Care, \$4** The liquid calcium in this fluoride toothpaste with baking soda fills in tiny cracks and crevices in the enamel where stains tend to hide out.

Blinded by the white Stay bright, but resist the urge to go radioactive.

If yellow-toothed slackers are at one end of the spectrum, at the other end are whitening addicts with glow-in-the-dark grins. Keep your bleach habit from going haywire.

FOLLOW THE DOCTOR'S ORDERS After an in-office bleaching, dentists often provide whitening gel and trays for maintenance. But if you abuse these kits, using them more frequently than your dentist prescribes or directions indicate, you could harm the dentin (the main part of your tooth under the enamel), resulting in temporary nerve damage and a so-white-it's-blue smile.

DON'T OVERDOSE ON DRUGSTORE KITS Even if you plan to touch up with less potent over-the-counter bleaching options, get your dentist's

OK first. Most whitening gels contain a bleaching agent called carbamide peroxide, which breaks down into ammonia. With loose-fitting drugstore molds, the gel easily seeps out onto gums, irritating them and possibly leading to tooth sensitivity.

BEWARED OF MAIL-IN MOLDS Avoid mall kiosks and websites hawking discounted do-it-yourself impressions (you send in the mold, they send you the custom-fit trays) and whitening gels, warns Gordon Isbell III, D.M.D., spokesman for the Academy of General Dentistry in Chicago. The powerful gel can harm dentin, and taking your own impressions (imagine a mouthful of industrial-strength Silly Putty) may pull out fillings and crowns—never mind that the goop is enough to make you gag!