

Teeth-Whitening Blunders to Avoid

By: Michele Bender

Thanks to easy at-home whitening products, beautifying your smile has never been simpler. However, in the quest for whiter teeth, there are some mistakes that can render your efforts less effective and others that can put your health and looks at risk. Here, the top teeth-whitening no-no's and how to avoid them.

Whitening mistake # 1: Using products longer than directed.

This is the top whitening faux pas. After all, if a little is good, then a lot is better, right? Wrong. Wearing your whitening strips or trays longer than you're supposed to is not going to bleach your teeth faster. "Instead, it can cause painful sensitivity by irritating the nerves in the teeth and burn the gums," explains New York City-based cosmetic dentist, **Lana Rozenberg, DDS**. "It can also leave teeth translucent and bluish on the edges." You can cause similar problems if you whiten too often -- for example, every four weeks, when a product recommends every six to twelve months. For best results, follow directions. "Most products have been tested and designed to work in a specific time period," adds **Rozenberg**.

Whitening mistake # 2: Letting excess gel seep onto your gums.

Whitening strips and trays use a gel to bleach your teeth and remove stains. However, when you press strips onto your teeth or insert trays, some of the excess gel may ooze out onto your gums. "This can burn your gums leaving them red and painful with the gum tissue sloughing off," explains **Rozenberg**. After applying a tooth-whitening product, check gums to see if any gel has seeped out onto them. If it has, diligently remove it with a gauze pad.

Whitening mistake # 3: Using products that aren't FDA-approved.

These teeth whiteners may be available, but that doesn't mean you should use them. "The FDA is there to protect us and requires companies to do safety tests and research before granting their approval," explains **Rozenberg**. A non-FDA approved product may not be effective, but that isn't the only issue. "When a product is not FDA approved, it could harm not only your teeth, but your body," cautions New York-based, celebrity dentist Marc Lowenberg, DDS. "Non-FDA approved teeth whitening products often use fillers and chemical concentrations that can damage teeth." With plenty of approved whitening products to choose from, it's better to be safe than sorry.



Whitening mistake # 4: Not being consistent.

If you don't use a product as often as directed, you may whiten your teeth but may not achieve the best results possible. "It takes time for teeth whitening products to work and you must be consistent in using them," explains Lowenberg. "If you stop your at-home teeth whitening routine, your teeth may become yellow again and you have to do the whole process over again." The bottom line is that you have to follow the instructions on these whitening products; the directions are there for a reason, says **Rozenberg**.

Whitening mistake # 5: Not prepping your pearly whites.

No matter how eager you are to brighten your teeth, you need to take a few minutes to clean them well before applying the trays, whitening strips, or other tooth whitener. "Otherwise the whitening product isn't going to be as effective, because plaque is covering the surface of the tooth," says **Rozenberg**. Brush, floss and then start turning up the wattage on your smile.

Whitening mistake # 6: Drinking or eating while whitening.

This may sound obvious, but some people do drink water -- and even eat -- when they have whitening strips or trays in their mouths. The seal between the whitening product and your mouth isn't a perfect one, making this a huge mistake for several reasons. "First, you may be diluting the whitening gel material so it will not be as effective," says **Rozenberg**. "Second, you may swallow some of the gel with your drink." Though the gel is made to go in your mouth, you don't want to ingest any more than you have to.