

## A Great Christmas Gift

By Dr. Chiann Fan Gibson

As the holiday season quickly approaches, we scurry around in a panic looking for last-minute gifts. Traditionally, people start the new year with a resolution to lose weight and eat healthier. Why not consider starting out the new year with a whiter, brighter smile with either a take-home or in-office tooth whitening gift? It might just be what the doctor ordered in making your new year a new smile year.

Professional teeth whitening options vary with either a one-time in-office visit (approximately one to two hours) or the at-home whitening system, which is a two-week process.

There are also many over-the-counter types of home bleaching products, but they do not have the whitening concentration that the professional products contain. There are also many over-the-counter whitening toothpastes available. These toothpastes contain mild abrasives that take off surface stains. They do not change the overall color or internal shade of your teeth, as do the professional products dental offices provide. So, what type of professional whitening system should you consider? Let's take a more in-depth look at tooth whitening.

You should have your dentist examine your teeth and gum tissue to make sure they are healthy. You should complete any restorative work (your cavities must be taken care of first) before you whiten your teeth. If you become a candidate for tooth bleaching or whitening, your dentist will suggest which whitening procedures will be effective for you and give you your options.

Depending on how yellow, brown or gray your teeth are, results will vary. Some individuals with very dark brown or gray hues may not find this a great option, as whiteners do not correct all types of discolorations. Individuals with previous dental work on their front teeth may not benefit from the in-office option either, because the whitening solutions will not affect the color of these materials. In these situations, other options to consider may be veneering, bonding or crowns. Individuals with white spot lesions may have to discuss a fluoride treatment, bonding or porcelain veneers.

The in-office whitening, or chairside bleaching, will give you an immediate result in just one sitting. But again, results do vary. A protective gel or shield is usually placed to isolate and protect the oral soft tissues. A bleaching agent is then applied to the teeth, and a special light is used to enhance the action of the agent. In-office whitening products generally contain hydrogen peroxide, with concentrations ranging between 15 percent and 35 percent. Some of the brand-name systems that dentists purchase for in-office whitening are Zoom!, BriteSmile, LaserSmile, LumaArch and Rembrandt

Sapphire.

As for take-home bleaching from your dental office, results may also vary. The intended use of these products is generally one to two weeks. The first step in the home bleaching procedure is your dentist making a custom-made mouth guard so the trays fit precisely. This mouthpiece allows the patient to dispense the bleaching gel into the tray, and it protects the rest of the mouth from contact with the bleaching chemicals. Most dentists recommend you wear your mouthpiece overnight or for several hours during the day or night. Be sure to follow your dentist's recommendations.

If you have a sensitivity issue, your dentist may recommend that you lessen the number of hours for whitening or provide you with a lower concentration of solution. They might also provide you with a professional fluoride dentrifice or toothpaste. Speak to your dentist if you are concerned about side effects. Pregnant women are also to avoid whitening procedures.

As procedures have become more available and affordable, tooth whitening is considered an elective cosmetic treatment. Insurances do not cover these procedures. Whitening treatments will also require possible reapplication to maintain that healthy white smile.

As the holiday season and new year approach, why not consider giving a gift that enhances your or someone else's smile? A smile says a thousand words. ... Why not make it a beautiful white smile?