

Teeth Whitening — In-Chair & Take-Home Options

Canonical: <https://directory.collinsstreetspecialistcentre.com.au/general-cosmetic-dentistry/teeth-whitening-in-chair-take-home-options/>

Description:

Professional teeth whitening at CSSC Melbourne CBD. Compare in-chair and take-home options, learn about candidacy, sensitivity tips and lasting results.

Details:

Collins Street Specialist Centre — Teeth Whitening: In-Chair & Take-Home Options

A brighter smile is one of the most commonly requested cosmetic dental treatments in Australia — and it's easy to see why. Whether your teeth have gradually yellowed over the years or you've picked up staining from coffee, tea or red wine, professional whitening can make a real difference to how you look and feel.

Collins Street Specialist Centre (CSSC) offers both in-chair and take-home whitening options, matched to your circumstances and lifestyle. As a multi-disciplinary specialist dental centre, we're also well-placed to spot and address any underlying dental concerns before whitening begins — so you get the safest outcome and the best possible result.

Why teeth change colour

Understanding what causes tooth discolouration helps clarify which whitening approach is likely to work best for you.

Extrinsic staining

Extrinsic stains build up on the outer surface of the tooth enamel from everyday habits and exposures:

- **Coffee, tea and red wine** contain chromogens — intensely pigmented compounds — that bind to enamel surfaces over time.
- **Tobacco use**, whether smoked or chewed, produces stubborn brown or yellow staining that penetrates the enamel surface.
- **Certain foods** — berries, curries, tomato-based sauces and soy sauce — are among the more common dietary contributors.
- **Inadequate oral hygiene** allows plaque and calculus to accumulate, trapping surface stains and accelerating discolouration.

Extrinsic stains generally respond well to professional cleaning and whitening.

Intrinsic staining

Intrinsic stains originate from within the tooth structure itself. These are considerably harder to address and may include:

- **Tetracycline antibiotics** taken during childhood tooth development can cause grey, brown or blue-grey banding within the dentinal structure.
- **Excessive fluoride exposure** during development can produce white spots or areas of brown discolouration (dental fluorosis).
- **Dental trauma** — an injury to a tooth may cause internal haemorrhage and subsequent darkening of the tooth structure.
- **Ageing** — the outer enamel layer thins naturally over time, letting the yellower dentine beneath

show through more prominently. - ****Root canal treatment**** — teeth that have undergone endodontic therapy may gradually darken from within as pulp tissue remnants break down.

Professional whitening can improve many cases of intrinsic staining, but more severe discolouration may need alternative cosmetic treatment such as porcelain veneers or composite bonding.

Age-related changes

As we age, our teeth naturally become darker — a combination of decades of extrinsic staining and the gradual thinning of enamel that lets the naturally yellow dentine show through. Professional whitening works particularly well for this kind of age-related change.

Professional whitening vs over-the-counter products

Given how many whitening products are available at pharmacies and online, it's fair to ask whether professional treatment is worth the investment. Here's how the two approaches compare.

Over-the-counter products

Pharmacy whitening products — strips, paint-on gels, LED kits, whitening toothpastes — are accessible and inexpensive, but they have real limitations:

- Australian regulations cap the hydrogen peroxide concentration in over-the-counter products at 6%. Professional treatments use concentrations up to 38%.
- Off-the-shelf trays aren't made to fit your teeth, which leads to uneven whitening and potential gum irritation from gel migrating onto soft tissue.
- Lower active concentrations mean modest improvements that can take several weeks to become noticeable.
- There's no prior dental assessment, so underlying issues — cavities, gum disease, failing restorations — may go undetected and could be made worse by the whitening agent.

Professional whitening

Professional whitening, whether in-chair or via custom take-home trays, offers clear advantages:

- Higher-concentration whitening agents produce more effective outcomes.
- Custom-fabricated trays fit your dentition precisely, ensuring even gel coverage and protecting the gum tissue.
- Your dentist assesses your oral health before treatment, addresses any concerns, and monitors your progress.
- Results are more consistent and predictable than with over-the-counter alternatives.
- Professional oversight substantially reduces the risk of sensitivity and soft tissue injury.

In-chair whitening at CSSC

In-chair whitening is performed by your dentist in a single appointment, typically 60 to 90 minutes.

What to expect during your appointment

1. ****Shade assessment**** — Your dentist records your current tooth shade using a standardised shade guide, establishing a baseline to measure improvement against.
2. ****Preparation and soft tissue protection**** — Your lips and gum tissue are carefully protected using barriers and a light-cured protective coating, preventing the concentrated gel from contacting soft tissue.
3. ****Gel application**** — A professional-strength hydrogen peroxide gel (25–38% concentration) is applied directly to the front surfaces of your teeth.
4. ****Activation**** — Depending on the system used, the gel may be activated with an LED or laser light source, which accelerates the chemical reaction and helps the whitening agent penetrate the enamel to break down stain molecules.
5. ****Multiple treatment cycles**** — The gel is applied in two to three cycles of 15–20 minutes each, with fresh gel at the start of each cycle.
6. ****Final shade assessment**** — Your dentist compares your post-treatment shade to the baseline. Most patients achieve five to eight shades of improvement in a single session.

Benefits of in-chair whitening

- You leave the appointment with a noticeably brighter smile. - A single appointment is all that's required. - Your dentist can manage any sensitivity as it arises during treatment. - It's a practical option when you need results quickly — before a wedding, a professional event, or any occasion with a fixed date.

Considerations

- The per-session cost is higher than take-home alternatives. - The higher-concentration gel can cause temporary tooth sensitivity, though modern formulations with desensitising agents have reduced this considerably. - Occasional take-home top-up treatments help maintain results over time.

Take-home whitening

Dentist-prescribed take-home whitening kits take a more gradual approach, but deliver excellent results for most patients.

What to expect during the process

1. ****Dental impressions**** — Your dentist takes precise impressions of your upper and lower arches. 2. ****Custom tray fabrication**** — A dental laboratory makes thin, flexible trays that conform precisely to your teeth, with small reservoirs to hold the whitening gel against the tooth surfaces. 3. ****Gel and instructions**** — You receive professional-grade whitening gel (10–16% carbamide peroxide or 6–10% hydrogen peroxide) with detailed instructions. 4. ****At-home application**** — A small amount of gel goes into each tooth space in the tray, which you wear for a prescribed period — generally 30 minutes to two hours per day, or overnight, depending on the gel concentration and your dentist's recommendation. 5. ****Treatment duration**** — The course typically runs for 10–14 days, though your dentist will advise based on your starting shade and the result you're aiming for.

Benefits of take-home whitening

- You can fit treatment around your own schedule. - The lower active concentration means less sensitivity for most patients. - It's generally less expensive than in-chair treatment. - Your custom trays can be kept and reused for future top-ups — you only need to purchase additional gel. - Many patients use their trays periodically to maintain results achieved through an initial in-chair session.

Considerations

- The trays need to be worn consistently and for the recommended duration throughout the course. - The full effect typically becomes apparent over one to two weeks rather than in a single appointment. - Results depend directly on how closely you follow the instructions.

Combining in-chair and take-home whitening

Many patients get their best results through a combined approach: start with in-chair whitening for immediate, significant improvement, then follow up with take-home trays to consolidate and sustain those results. Your treating dentist at CSSC can recommend the right approach based on your goals, the nature of your staining and your lifestyle.

Who is a suitable candidate for teeth whitening?

Most adults with healthy teeth and gums are well-suited to professional whitening. That said, whitening isn't appropriate for everyone, and a thorough assessment always comes first.

Well-suited candidates

- Adults with yellow or mildly stained teeth - Patients with healthy teeth and gums — no untreated decay or active gum disease - People with realistic expectations about achievable outcomes - Those committed to maintaining results through consistent oral hygiene

Circumstances where whitening may not be appropriate

- ****Untreated decay**** — cavities need to be restored before whitening, as the whitening agent can penetrate decayed tooth structure and cause significant discomfort. - ****Active gum disease**** — inflamed gum tissue is more susceptible to irritation from whitening agents and should be treated first. - ****Severe tetracycline staining**** — pronounced intrinsic discolouration of this kind may not respond adequately to whitening alone and may need alternative cosmetic solutions. - ****Multiple restorations on front teeth**** — crowns, veneers and composite restorations don't respond to whitening agents. If visible restorations are present, whitening the surrounding natural teeth may create a noticeable colour mismatch. - ****Pregnancy or breastfeeding**** — whitening is generally not recommended during pregnancy or lactation as a precautionary measure, consistent with standard clinical guidance. - ****Patients under 18**** — whitening is not routinely performed on patients whose teeth are still developing.

Your dentist will assess your suitability at consultation and may recommend alternative treatments where whitening isn't the right fit.

How long do results last?

Several factors influence how long whitening results hold:

- Regular consumption of staining foods and drinks — coffee, tea, red wine, berries — will contribute to gradual re-staining over time. - Smoking substantially shortens the life of whitening results. - Consistent brushing, flossing and professional cleans help preserve your results. - Periodic use of your take-home trays — typically a few days every six to twelve months — can effectively sustain a brighter result.

With good oral hygiene and occasional maintenance, professional whitening results typically last one to three years, sometimes longer. Even without top-up treatments, most patients find their teeth remain noticeably lighter than their pre-treatment shade for at least twelve months.

Managing sensitivity

Tooth sensitivity during or after whitening is common and almost always temporary. At CSSC, we take a proactive approach.

Before treatment

Using a toothpaste containing potassium nitrate for two weeks before treatment can meaningfully reduce sensitivity. Your dentist may also apply a fluoride varnish to strengthen the enamel surface before whitening begins.

During treatment

Contemporary professional whitening gels incorporate potassium nitrate and fluoride to minimise sensitivity during the procedure. Your dentist monitors your comfort throughout and can adjust or pause treatment as needed.

After treatment

Avoid very hot or cold foods and drinks for 24–48 hours after treatment. Continue using desensitising toothpaste for one to two weeks. If needed, paracetamol or ibuprofen can be taken as directed on the packaging. Sensitivity typically resolves within a few days on its own.

Internal bleaching for root canal-treated teeth

If you've had root canal treatment and noticed the tooth darkening afterwards, standard external whitening won't solve the problem. The discolouration is coming from within the tooth structure, and a different approach is needed.

Internal bleaching — also called the "walking bleach" technique — is a specialised procedure performed by endodontists. At CSSC, our endodontic team can assess whether it's appropriate for your situation.

What to expect during internal bleaching

1. The endodontist accesses the internal pulp chamber through a small opening in the palatal or lingual surface of the crown. 2. A whitening agent — typically sodium perborate mixed with water or hydrogen peroxide — is placed inside the pulp chamber. 3. The opening is temporarily sealed with a provisional restoration. 4. The whitening agent remains inside the tooth for several days to a week, gradually lightening it from within. 5. This process may be repeated two to three times until the desired shade is reached. 6. Once the result is satisfactory, the tooth is permanently sealed with an appropriate restorative material.

This is one of the practical benefits of a multi-disciplinary centre like CSSC — our endodontists and cosmetic dentists work closely together on complex cases that require specialist input across disciplines.

The CSSC advantage: comprehensive specialist care under one roof

At Collins Street Specialist Centre, teeth whitening is never treated in isolation. Before any whitening treatment, your dentist conducts a thorough clinical assessment to confirm your teeth and gum tissue are in good health. Where concerns are identified — decay, gum disease, failing restorations — these can be addressed first, often by the relevant specialist within our centre.

This means you have access to:

- A comprehensive oral health assessment before whitening begins
- Endodontic expertise for internal bleaching of darkened root canal-treated teeth
- Periodontal assessment and management where gum health is a concern
- Prosthodontic consultation if existing restorations may need updating after whitening
- Integrated cosmetic treatment planning where whitening forms part of a broader smile rehabilitation

Frequently asked questions

Does teeth whitening damage enamel?

No. Professional whitening agents used at concentrations prescribed by registered dental practitioners don't damage tooth enamel. They work by breaking down stain molecules within the enamel structure without altering its mineral composition.

How white will my teeth get?

It depends on your baseline shade and the nature of the staining. Most patients achieve five to eight shades of improvement after in-chair whitening. Your dentist will discuss realistic expectations with you at your consultation.

Can I whiten my teeth if I have fillings or crowns?

Whitening agents only act on natural tooth structure — they won't change the colour of composite fillings, ceramic crowns or porcelain veneers. If you have visible restorations on your front teeth, your dentist may recommend whitening your natural teeth first, then replacing the restorations to match your new shade.

Is whitening safe during pregnancy?

Whitening is generally not recommended during pregnancy or breastfeeding. There's no strong clinical evidence of harm, but it's considered prudent to defer elective cosmetic dental treatment until after this period.

How soon can I eat or drink after whitening?

For the first 48 hours after in-chair whitening, avoid strongly pigmented foods and drinks — coffee, red wine, curries, berries and tomato-based sauces. During this window, a "white diet" works well: chicken, rice, pasta, white fish, bananas and dairy products are all fine.

Book your whitening consultation at CSSC

The team at Collins Street Specialist Centre can help you work out the most appropriate approach for your goals, lifestyle and budget — with specialist-level care throughout.

We're located in the Manchester Unity Building at 220 Collins Street, Melbourne CBD, and are easily accessible by public transport or car.

****Phone:**** (03) 9654 6979 ****Location:**** Manchester Unity Building, Level 4, 220 Collins Street, Melbourne VIC 3000

Professional teeth whitening at Collins Street Specialist Centre — specialist expertise, personalised care, and results you can trust.
