

Question

Whitening toothpaste: Does it whiten teeth?

Does whitening toothpaste actually whiten teeth?

Answer

from Alan Carr, D.M.D.

Whitening toothpaste can whiten teeth slightly by removing surface stains, such as those caused by drinking coffee or smoking. Whitening toothpaste can also be used after a bleaching treatment to help maintain results. However, whitening toothpaste can't change the natural color of teeth or reverse discoloration caused by excessive exposure to fluoride during tooth development, penetrating surface stains or decay.

To remove surface stains, whitening toothpaste may include:

- Special abrasives that gently polish the teeth
- Chemicals, such as sodium tripolyphosphate, that help break down or dissolve stains

When used twice a day, whitening toothpaste typically takes two to four weeks to make teeth whiter. However, new research shows that whitening toothpaste containing the chemical blue covarine can make teeth appear immediately whiter. After use, blue covarine adheres to the surface of the teeth and creates an optical illusion that makes teeth appear less yellow.

Whitening toothpaste is generally safe for daily use, but excessive use might damage tooth enamel. If you're considering using a whitening toothpaste, look for a brand that has a seal of approval from a reputable dental organization — such as the American Dental Association (ADA) Seal of Acceptance, which indicates that the toothpaste is effective at removing surface stains and reducing tooth decay. If you're not satisfied with the effect of whitening toothpaste, talk to your dentist or dental hygienist about more effective tooth whitening options.
