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The Brighter, Whiter Smile

Discover what new teeth whitening techniques are best for your big day

As her wedding day approaches, every bride wants that picture-perfect smile. Teeth whitening has become as accessible as it is coveted—and that means many options. But which is the best one for you (and your wallet) as you approach the big day? Fashionablebride.com got to the root of it and asked the experts their thoughts on the latest trends and techniques.

Dollar Sense

First, it all comes down to your budget. Celebrity dentist Dr. Jeff Golub-Evans of the New York Center for Cosmetic Dentistry (nyccd.com) assures that in-office whitening is superior to at-home treatments.

"In-office whitening is best, safest, most effective, and longest lasting, but also the most costly," says Dr. Golub-Evans. He goes one step further and notes it's also the "safest because it has the least contact time, and the health/beauty provider places a waxy mask on sensitive areas of the teeth and the surrounding tissue."

However, if you're saving extra change for your dream dress, there are over-the-counter remedies that can whiten your teeth effectively. "Whitening strips are the best over-the-counter option. They're safe, effective, and affordable," says Dr. Golub-Evans. But beware: each gauze strip is covered in a pre-measured, one-size-fits-all layer of peroxide, and the lack of personalized dosage can lead to discomfort for sensitive teeth.

The Color Test

And while veneers are a popular way to perfect a smile, they can cost thousands of dollars—and you may not even need them in the first place. "Hold a piece of computer paper up to your teeth to compare colors," says Dr. Golub-Evans. "Yellow teeth bleach best because it's surface pigment; they're a great candidate for whitening. Brown or tan teeth means you are a moderately good candidate for whitening, but grey bleaches the least well." Those with considerably dark stains and lackluster form should consider bonding or porcelain veneers.

Jacksonville, FL-based dentist Colleen Olitsky (smilestylist.com), aka "the Smile Stylist," agrees: Whitening is the least expensive way to brighten your smile in time for that big day. "We tell people if they are on a budget, try over-the-counter first," says Dr. Olitsky. "You may find your teeth respond well and you do not need to spend a lot of money. We found that Crest 3D White Strips (\$54.99, drugstore.com) work best. The biggest issue with any whitening treatment is compliance, meaning you need to follow the directions and actually do the whitening protocol recommended."

But Dr. Olitsky warns that "any over-the-counter whitening boasting a light or a tray system is not any good. The light is a gimmick and the trays do not fit well, making whitening painful and bad-tasting."

The Lasting Effect

The problem with teeth whitening for many clients is that it simply doesn't last. Dr. John Koutsoyiannis, a New York City dentist (sohosmiles.com), says, "In order to maximize the longevity of your treatment, it is important to avoid foods and drinks that could stain your teeth (such as coffee, tea, red wine, blueberries, etc.) for at least three days after completing your treatment."

So, when should you whiten? Dr. Olitsky says brides should aim to do the treatment one month before the big day. Results lasts anywhere from two months to two years depending on genetics and lifestyle (how much red wine, soda, coffee, or tea you drink, and whether you smoke). As a rule, anything that would stain your favorite white T-shirt is a danger zone for your mouth.

Above all, healthy eating and proper maintenance is important for preserving a tip-top smile. According to Dr. Timothy Chase, a former clinical instructor at New York University Dental School, a beautiful smile starts with good oral hygiene, including regular cleanings. In fact, a healthy smile can take ten years off of your look—and your wedding photos.

- Aly Walansky