



## PARENT PLUS

INFORMATION FROM YOUR PEDIATRICIAN

### Save your smile: Weigh options before whitening teeth

Before allowing your child to use dental bleaching or whitening products, consider the possible side effects and reasons for brightening those pearly whites.



Dental bleaching, or tooth whitening, has become a popular cosmetic procedure that is available in drugstores and dentists' offices. However, the safety of dental bleaching has been studied mostly on adults rather than children. The process can cause discomfort and tooth sensitivity.

Prevention can be an effective first step against tooth discoloration. Simple changes to a child's eating habits, like avoiding sodas and foods that darken teeth such as soy sauce, grape juice and sugary fruit drinks, can help reduce yellowing and tooth staining in children, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).

For school-age children and adolescents, the AAP recommends tartar-control toothpaste to help keep plaque from adhering to teeth. The AAP also advises that children visit a dentist for a cleaning and checkup twice a year.

Whitening toothpastes also can be used to help remove surface stains, but these pastes do not remove deep stains, according to the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD).

Some medical reasons warrant dental bleaching. Discolored teeth can result from injury, damage and infection.

A child's negative self-image also might be a reason for dental bleaching.

Children's teeth can appear discolored at certain stages of development, such as when permanent teeth emerge. Primary and permanent teeth vary in enamel thickness, so some of the permanent teeth will appear discolored when compared to the primary teeth.

According to guidelines from the AAPD, children and adolescents considering dental bleaching should:

- consult a dentist to determine the appropriate method for and timing of dental whitening;
- avoid having all teeth bleached if both baby and adult teeth are present; and
- consider side effects, such as tooth sensitivity, tissue irritation and root damage, before undergoing dental bleaching.

— David Ma