

White Lightening

WITH SO MANY TYPES OF TREATMENT AVAILABLE, YOUR DENTAL FUTURE IS BRIGHTER THAN EVER

BY JENNA MCCARTHY

IT TAKES A STROKE OF GENETIC luck to score long legs. Costly laser or chemical peels (if one is of a certain age) to get a line-free face. Gruesome hours in the gym to earn six-pack abs. But for relatively little time and expense, just about anyone can have a pie hole full of blindingly white teeth. And if you look around, just about everyone does.

The tooth-whitening industry is a fairly new one, so global spending figures aren't readily available. But according to a spokesperson for the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry, surveys show that in all age groups, bleaching is the number-one cosmetic dental service requested. Not surprisingly, the number of patients opting to go whiter has grown by more than 300 percent in the past five years. Bottle blondes beware: That's a whole lot of peroxide being accidentally swallowed.

"People in L.A. get their teeth bleached for the same reason they don't drive around in dirty cars with dirty fingernails," says John Ivey, D.M.D., a cosmetic dentist in Beverly Hills. "It makes people look better, and it makes them look younger. If everyone got their teeth whitened, they'd smile more. It would be a better world."

PUT YOUR MONEY WHERE YOUR MOUTH IS For folks looking to lighten up, options abound. If \$500-plus isn't a problem, in-office "power bleaching" offers instant gratification. A whitening gel con-



taining highly concentrated hydrogen peroxide is applied to teeth, then activated by heat, light, or laser energy. Results can be seen after anywhere between one and five 45-minute visits. A common, usually temporary downside to white-right-now is increased sensitivity to heat or cold, which can last as long as a week after a treatment.

Half a notch up on the affordability scale is dentist-supervised at-home bleaching. With this method the patient wears a custom-fitted mouth tray containing a peroxide-based whitening gel for a few hours every day or night, preferably when no one else is around. (You'll talk funny, look even funnier, and have a frequent, irresistible urge to spit.) Trays are generally worn for two to five weeks. Because weaker concentrations of

peroxide are used, results are more gradual and sensitivity is minimized. Trays and bleach start around \$400.

Students, struggling actors, and others on a budget can pick up over-the-counter whitening products at their local Longs or Rite Aid for as little as a few bucks. While no one will confuse you with Julia Roberts after a week or two of using the whitening toothpaste or kit, over time these products can make a noticeable difference.

"Ultradent is a really cheap toothpaste that gives great results," says Ivey, who feels that regular brushing with whitening paste can help keep a dentist-whitened smile brighter, longer. "My wife uses it and loves it. Another good one is Rembrandt. A lot of patients that I compliment on their teeth