

Is cosmetic tooth bleaching a viable alternative for you?

Question: I've heard a lot lately about cosmetic tooth bleaching. Does it work? Is it safe? What is the difference between an over-the-counter bleaching kit and having the bleaching done at my dentist's office?

ASK THE DENTIST



DR. DAVID BANDA

Answer: Tooth bleaching (whitening) is such a popular dental procedure in the United States that it is estimated to comprise over 70 percent of the cosmetic procedures performed each year in general dental offices. It's very effective and quite safe for the vast majority of people who try it. However, there are some concerns that the prudent consumer should consider before undergoing any bleaching procedure.

First, there are two distinct groups of tooth bleaching products available — the kind offered over the counter sold in drug stores and the kind available by prescription from your dentist. I would like to provide some information that may surprise you concerning the safety and effectiveness of these two different product groups.

The over-the-counter systems, while often appearing inexpensive compared to a dental office bleaching, are often accompanied by a host of potential problems. First, only a dentist is able to properly determine the appropriate method of tooth whitening for you. There may be conditions present in your mouth that are making your teeth darker than you would like and that may not be helped or could even be worsened by bleaching.

Let's say, for example, that you have dark spots on your teeth that are not food stains but actually cavities and you go ahead and use an over-the-counter bleaching agent without a dentist's supervision. The over-the-counter brands are often more acidic than the prescription bleaching available at your dentist's office and may actually make the cavities bigger and even painful. A dentist would have been able to diagnose the situation before it worsened.

Read the label!
Some of the over-the-counter bleaching systems contain titanium dioxide, a pigment commonly found in white paint! I would not recommend swallowing this product, but you may do just that by using the techniques promoted by some of the over-the-counter bleaching companies. The over-the-counter bleaches are often applied by swabbing on a gel in your mouth or by rinsing with an acidic solution that can begin to dissolve your tooth enamel. Sometimes a "bottle and bite" plastic tray is used to hold the bleaching solution (or gel) in place, sometimes while you're sleeping. This "bleach while you sleep" method is correct in practice but due to the one-size-fits-all nature of the store-bought mouth trays, you may unknowingly be placing the bleaching solution next to your gums. That can result in unnecessary sensitivity.

Ask your dentist
Your dentist may put your fears to rest by providing safe solutions to your tooth-whitening needs. Only your dentist can diagnose your acid levels and recommend which methods of tooth whitening may suit your individual needs. If you and your dentist decide that tooth bleaching is for you, the dentist or a staff member will begin by assessing your cleaning history.

A simple cleaning and polishing can remove a great deal of build up on teeth that can trap acids and make teeth look dark. A good polishing can also allow the bleaching solution to be applied directly on the teeth — not on accumulated debris — and will make the bleaching more effective.

If you haven't had a bleaching or polishing for six months or more, you may want to ask your dentist or hygienist if you should have a cleaning and polishing before beginning the procedure.

Next, impressions (molds) will be made of your teeth so that custom made plastic trays can be fabricated to fit your teeth exactly and to provide protection for your gums. These trays are carefully designed to create small "pockets" in the trays that, so that an adequate quantity of the bleaching solution can be held next to the teeth while you wear the trays.

The trays can be worn comfortably while you sleep for generally 10-14 days, depending on the amount of color changes desired. A new formulation on the market only requires two, 30-minute sessions for 10-14 days to achieve an improvement of several shades, very comparable to the overnight counterparts! The dental office staff will then give you instructions regarding what food and drink to eliminate from your diet during the bleaching procedure. Items like coffee, tea, red wine, cola, tomato sauces and blueberry pie can hinder the bleaching process and should be avoided for the entire time that you are bleaching your teeth at home.

Smoking will also significantly reduce the color improvement of your teeth and should be avoided during bleaching. It is important to note if you avoid the items like the ones listed above during your bleaching procedure, you may return to drinking coffee, etc., and still maintain a desirable color improvement for 1-3 years before wishing to touch up your bleaching.

Touch-up bleaching is usually faster and much less expensive than initial bleaching because you can use your original bleaching trays.

Before you take your bleaching kit home for the first time, a dental team member will explain the potential sensitivity during the bleaching process. This is usually minor — if it occurs at all — and is transient. Bleaching is most often not covered by dental insurance due to its classification as an optional cosmetic procedure. The cost of bleaching varies depending on the system used, the number of teeth to be bleached, and the length of time that bleaching will be required to achieve the desired color. It's best to ask your dentist for advice on your specific situation.

(Dr. David Banda is a general dentist in Bloomfield Hills. He graduated from the University of Michigan and is a member of the American Dental Association, the Michigan Dental Association and the Oakland County Dental Society. His column will appear every other week in the Health & Fitness section. Send questions or comments for Dr. Banda in care of staff writer Chris Meyer at The Eccentric Newspapers, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham, MI 48009.)

HERE'S TO YOUR HEALTH

Skin cancer program takes place statewide

Free help available for anxiety sufferers

The American Cancer Society, Great Lakes Division and the Michigan Dermatological Society will sponsor Skin Cancer Detection Day, a program providing free skin cancer screenings throughout Michigan, Wednesday, May 6.

This year's chairperson for the event, Dr. Helen Dombrowski of Dearborn, expects several thousand people to participate in the screenings taking place at more than 30 sites in 21 counties around the state.

Last year's effort screened nearly 3,800 people.

"Skin cancer is highly preventable, yet it is the nation's most common cancer," Dr. Dombrowski said. "For this reason, we need to reach more people with information and regular screenings if we are to successfully reduce the prevalence and mortality of this disease."

This will be the 13th year that these organizations have teamed up to offer the skin cancer screenings in Michigan.

According to Dr. Dombrowski, the skin cancer screening sites usually fill to capacity very quickly. Some screenings are by appointment only, while others are on a first-come, first-served basis.

The public is encouraged to schedule appointments now or arrive early to assure service. Because some of the dermatologists will cover several communities, certain screenings will be held on days other than May 6.

"Most will be held May 6, but we want people to know that there is some flexibility in scheduling an appointment," Dr. Dombrowski said. "And we encourage people to plan now."

SKIN CANCER DETECTION DAY

Here's a list of area sites participating in Wednesday's Skin Cancer Detection Day, sponsored by the American Cancer Society, Great Lakes Division and the Michigan Dermatological Society. Call (248) 657-5336 for more information, unless noted.

- BIRMINGHAM: The Community House (380 S. Bates), 1 p.m.-4:30 p.m., first-come, first-served basis.
- LYONIA: Lyons Mall, 10 a.m.-2 p.m., first-come, first-served basis.
- ROCHESTER: Crittenton Hospital (1101 E. University Drive), 8 a.m.-5 p.m., by appointment only (248-552-5269).
- WEST BLOOMFIELD: Sports Club of West Bloomfield (6343 Farmington Road), 8 a.m.-4 p.m., first-come, first-served basis.

The screenings will consist of a painless visual exam by a licensed dermatologist. Anyone found to have a suspicious skin area will be referred to a local dermatologist for follow-up care, according to Dr. Dombrowski.

According to the American Cancer Society and the Michigan Dermatological Society, protecting the skin from the sun's rays is the best way to guard against developing skin cancer.

Avoiding the sun between the hours of 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. when the sun's rays are the strongest, and use of sunscreen with an SPF of at least 15 is a person's best protection.

The early warning signs of skin cancer are best described by the "ABCDs" of a wart, mole or patch of skin: A — asymmetrical in shape; B — border irregularity; C — color of the growth is not uniform; and D — diameter is greater than 6 millimeters.

ANXIETY SCREENING DAY

Here's a list of area sites where free anxiety screening programs will be held Wednesday. Call the corresponding phone number for specific information.

- BIRMINGHAM: Birmingham Maple Clinic, (248) 656-5659.
- BLOOMFIELD HILLS: Family Center, (248) 642-8042.
- CLARKSTON: Advanced Counseling Services, (248) 922-2300.
- ROCHESTER: Rochester Medical Center, (248) 608-6800.
- SOUTHFIELD: A-1-800-Therapist, Inc., (800) 843-7274.
- SOUTHFIELD: Access Christian Counseling, (248) 355-4300.
- WEST BLOOMFIELD: ADA Center for Anxiety & Mood Disorders, (248) 932-3733.
- WEST BLOOMFIELD: Wartel Psychological Services, (248) 628-1330.

With these disorders; patients undergoing cognitive therapy learn to understand how their thoughts contribute to the symptoms of anxiety disorders and how to change those thought patterns to reduce the likelihood of occurrence and intensity of reaction.

Proper and effective medications may have a role in treatment, in addition to psychotherapy. In cases where medications are used, the patient's care may be managed jointly by a therapist and physician. Call 1-888-442-2022 for the nearest screening location nearest you. See the chart above for a list of local sites.

(The Michigan Psychological Association has a Statewide Referral Service. Individuals may receive the names of licensed psychologists in their area by calling 1-800-270-9070.)

Behavioral therapy involves using techniques to reduce or stop the undesired behavior associated

Refined reminder

Area company develops 'daily' disc

Many of us have difficulty remembering seemingly innocent tasks. But Victor Hirsch believes he has a product that can help accomplish such chores.

Hirsch is president of Bloomfield Township-based Keystone Products, developer of the Daily Reminder Disc. The newly patented invention was originally designed as an aide to help people monitor their own or someone else's medication.

"I'm the type of person who's absent-minded and doesn't always remember things well," Hirsch said. "I'm always wondering, 'Did I do this, did I do that' and that's one of the reasons I came up with this item. It's such a unique product in that it can help you keep track of things like taking medication or vitamins with accuracy."

Hirsch says his invention has gradually developed other uses, in addition to monitoring medicine intake. For instance, one person used it in conjunction with how many feedings per day his dog was supposed to receive.

"It's kind of evolved into that," Hirsch said. "People are finding other ways to use the product, and it makes sense because it's so effective and simple to use."

The Daily Reminder Disc is itself of simple



Simple as 1-2-3: One use for a Daily Reminder Disc is for the monitoring of medicine intake.

design — light, compact, sturdy and self-explanatory. Snapping off a tab on the appropriate day by unfolding and folding it to the center constitutes its basic use and an adhesive backing allows for attachment to most surfaces, like the top of a medicine bottle. The discs are also available for one, two, three- or four-day chores.

Wesley Drugs in Birmingham (100 W. 14 Mile Road) is currently carrying the Daily Reminder Disc, and Hirsch continues to pursue additional avenues in which to market the product.

The Daily Reminder Disc is also available through Keystone Products. For more details, contact the company by writing to: Keystone Products, P.O. Box 7386, Bloomfield Hills, MI 48302-7386.

Recognize link between moods and eating patterns

TALK TO THE MIRROR



FLORINE MARK

I will never forget the time in high school when I had a miserable day and subsequently came home and drowned my sorrows in a tub of double-chocolate ice cream.

I just tell you how much I actually ate, but I can assure you it was more than one serving — and it was NOT low fat. It made me feel even worse. When I was done, I had just done to my body.

Sound familiar? You may have a similar story stored in your memory banks, or perhaps you had an experience just like that today. It's certainly not uncommon. Both women and men often reach for food when they're hungry in order to satisfy an emotional need.

Anger is the worst offender. If you are angry with yourself for some reason, you may reach for food to punish yourself. Or maybe you're angry with your spouse, so you turn to food to release that anger as a form of revenge.

In another case, you may feel you've been wronged at work or by a friend. And you turn to food to improve your mood by treating yourself to a sweet desert.

No matter what the source of the anger, emotional eating turns to food before they try to resolve their feelings. If you want to take control of emotionally enhanced eating, I suggest addressing your anger directly and try to resolve the conflict. If you're still hungry — because you haven't eaten in several hours, for instance — there are certain foods that are better than others to reach for.

Avoid sugary foods when you're angry. Eat complex carbohydrates like whole grain bread and cereals, potatoes, brown rice, and pasta. The foods you choose may actually be altering your mood because different foods can trigger a variety of chemical reactions in the brain.

Anxiety is another major trigger of emotional eating. Many people try to calm themselves by eating "comfort foods" such as cookies, cake and chocolate. The initial result is a short period of relaxation but then your mood sinks like a stone. This is not a good solution for anxiety problems.

If you must turn to food when you're anxious, reach for fresh fruit, nuts or a baked potato. Steer clear of tempting nibbles like chocolate, coffee, ice cream or cake. A better way to deal with your nerves is to get plenty of sleep and take time to relax. Take some slow, deep breaths and concentrate on clearing your mind through meditation or exercise or whatever works for you — besides food.

The next eating trigger probably hits home with a lot of people: boredom. It's hard to believe that anyone could really be bored when there always seems to be a million things that need to be done. But, at some time or another, many people eat out of boredom.

The key to avoiding this pitfall is to catch yourself the minute you start feeling bored and subsequently start thinking about food. Divert your attention by taking a walk or working on your photo album. Whatever you do, do it for at least 10 minutes after the onset of boredom, then drink a large glass of water to fill your stomach.

If you end up turning to food some of the time, eat a small portion of a high-protein, low-fat food like grilled tuna or chicken. Be sure to avoid the high-carbohydrate foods that may provide a quicker fix.

Perhaps the worst of emotions that can lead to overeating is depression. Some-

HEALTHY LIVING

Great Strides Walk

Help in the fight against cystic fibrosis (CF) by participating in the upcoming Great Strides Walk at the Pontiac Silverdome. Scheduled for Saturday, May 3 and sponsored by North Oakland Medical Center, this walk-a-thon begins at 10 a.m. — registration is at 9 a.m. — on the Silverdome's indoor, six-mile long track. Whether you participate by walking or sponsoring friends and relatives, your support is invaluable to the 30,000 children and young adults faced with cystic fibrosis every day. Each person who collects \$50 will earn an official CF T-shirt. For more information or to register for the event, call Jim Scussell at (248) 657-7059.

Estragen seminar

Bloomfield Hills Andover High School will be the site for an upcoming free seminar entitled "Estragen Replacement Therapy Options & Alternatives." Sponsored by Forest Therapeutics and presented by Dr. William Bates, the event is scheduled for 7 p.m. Tuesday, May 5. Refreshments will also be made available free of charge. There is no pre-registration required. Andover High School is located at 4209 Andover Road, off Long Lake Road just west of Telegraph.

Fibromyalgia treatments

Fibromyalgia specialist Dr. Martin Tamler will address current treatment protocols for fibromyalgia (nearly pain and stiffness in soft tissues including muscles, tendons and ligaments) during a radio program later this month. The presentation will take place Friday, May 16 at 10 a.m. on WPON-AM 1460. There will be a re-broadcast at 6 p.m.

Recognize link between moods and eating patterns

times people feel depressed, or even just a little down and they turn to food for satisfaction. The result is the reverse effect. Binging ends up leading to feelings of guilt and lower self-esteem. Instead of indulging in a bit of ice cream, you'd be better off talking to someone who cares about you. Or try to do something active; it will help soothe you and provide an energy boost.

Finally, believe it or not, happiness is an emotion which elicits overeating in many people. People feel entitled to be treated or a big meal during happy occasions (birthdays, etc.), but happiness does not equal eating, so don't overdo it. People tend to gravitate toward fatty foods when they're happy, but any healthy, low-fat food — in moderation — is a better choice.

I read every one of your letters and I love your comment I often write about the topics my readers request. Please keep writing me with any questions, inspirational stories or suggestions for upcoming articles to: "Talk to the Mirror," Weight Watchers Corporate Communications, P.O. Box 9972, Farmington Hills, MI 48334-2974. For more information on Weight Watchers, call 1-888-3FLORINE.

(Florine Mark is an appointee to the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness and the Michigan Fitness Foundation.)