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Introduction to  
"How to Cope With Problems After Tooth Bleaching"  
article in Japanese journal, *Dental Outlook*

No subject in dentistry has taken the imagination of the population more than tooth whitening or bleaching of natural teeth. When I first researched the effects for myself over forty years ago, I was amazed at the results that could be achieved. And now years later it is finally accepted by dentists and patients alike.

Today because of its predictability, convenience, and relative low cost, bleaching of natural teeth should be one of the standard treatment considerations for almost every patient desiring to improve their smile. It has become the most often requested treatment of all esthetic procedures. We believe each patient should be offered the opportunity to have "lighter teeth."

#### What Happens After Bleaching?

Assuming patients are comfortable with the technique utilized, then restorative therapy can begin. However, for those patients who have sensitivity, it is important to alter the technique to accommodate each patient's threshold of discomfort.

First a determination must be made as to **why** the patient is feeling discomfort. Are the pulps so large that once the bleaching solution penetrates through the dentin, there is a reaction in the soft tissue?

In-office power bleaching works well for those patients who have little or no sensitivity. The concentration of the bleaching solution can be adjusted to the patient's individual tolerance level. Home bleaching works extremely well in combination with in-office treatments when patients have little sensitivity. For patients with soft tissue sensitivity, home bleaching alone with a weaker solution can also be effective. The patient's comfort should be considered even if the efficacy of the procedure is lessened by a weaker solution.

Research has shown that bleaching over extended periods of time – up to a year – can be extremely effective in most cases. By using lower concentrations of bleach, it may take longer to obtain the same result, but eventually that patient may well be satisfied with the tooth whitening technique, and with little or no discomfort.

For those patients who can tolerate power bleaching and have pleasing results within a period of 1 – 3 months, what options remain for them? In the initial planning we like to suggest that bleaching be utilized in any situation where a patient wants a lighter colored result in the final smile. When the entire upper arch is done, the lower arch is bleached first to obtain a shade and then we match that patient's new tooth color in the final restorations in the opposite arch.

When we are planning to do two or four anterior teeth, routinely the cuspids and bicuspid, and even first molars if they show in the widest smile, are first bleached until

the patient likes the shade achieved. The opposing teeth are also bleached if they are in harmony with the rest of the mouth. Should they need restorations, the teeth are bleached first and then any cosmetic restorations to alter the shapes or sizes of the teeth are attempted. However, if the teeth are too badly damaged and require porcelain laminates to correct the tooth color, then obviously bleaching does not need to be attempted on those teeth, and the laminates can be made to coordinate with the final treatment plan. Nevertheless, the adjacent or opposing teeth are still bleached when the patient desires a lighter tooth color.

#### Problems With Getting The Teeth Too Light

One of the major problems to come about in the past several years has been extra bleaching to achieve extremely light shades. This aim toward lighter and lighter teeth has created a real problem for dentistry. So much so that "bleaching shades" (extremely white shades) had to be created in composite resin and ceramics. There are a number of companies today that have special bleaching shades that can be utilized. In fact, it is advisable to have one of more of these shades in your inventory in order to satisfy the patient desiring their teeth bleached to an extremely light shade.

However, the best solution may be to monitor your patient's progress by having the patient return regularly (every 2 – 3 weeks) to regulate how light the teeth are becoming. By closely monitoring the effects of the home bleaching treatments, you can show the patient what has been achieved and allow you to get an excellently matched result. However, if that patient wants to obtain an **extra** white shade, it must be

realized that matching the final restoration will require special consideration, possibly including increased time, effort and expense.

Be sure you discontinue the bleaching process at least 3 weeks before attempting to choose the shade of the final restorations. This will help ensure that the shade of the bleached teeth has "settled" or "stabilized", and the final restoration shade will precisely match the natural teeth.

Above all, bleaching of teeth requires open communication, dedicated cooperation and close monitoring by dentist and patient. Only in this way can you and your patient achieve what we consider to be the ultimate in dentistry – the brightest and greatest smile your patient can obtain!

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