

Natural Teeth Whiteners

DESERT ESSENCE WHITENING PLUS TOOTHPASTE, COOL MINT

Bamboo stem fiber and baking soda help fight stains naturally, while sea salt and zinc citrate help reduce plaque and wintergreen and Australian tea tree oils freshen breath. Try the Whitening Plus Mouthwash for a fully clean mouth. desertessence.com

INVITAMIN NATURAL TOOTH & GUM POWDER WITH ACTIVATED CHARCOAL + WOOBAMBOO TOOTHBRUSH

Get healthy gums with this activated charcoal blend, which absorbs bacteria and toxins, fights halitosis and whitens natural teeth color. The soft WooBamboo toothbrush helps to gently scrub away stains. invitamin.com

THERANEEM NATURALS DENTAL FLOSS

Neem, traditionally used in Ayurveda for oral health care, supports healthy gums. This natural wax floss, available in mint or cinnamon flavors, has concentrated extracts of neem leaf and bark, grape seed, licorice, fennel and clove. luckyvitamin.com

WHITENING LIGHTNING ZERO WHITE TEETH WHITENING SYSTEM

This natural whitening system uses a baking soda/botanical solution including pomegranate extract, which contains malic acid—a natural astringent that lightens teeth. The gluten-free, cruelty-free system doesn't cause any pain or sensitivity. whiteninglightning.com

GURUNANDA PULLING OIL

This Ayurvedic product essentially detoxes the mouth with a blend of sesame, sunflower, peppermint and coconut oils that work to whiten teeth, maintain healthy gums and freshen the breath. amazon.com



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A Whiter, Brighter Smile

Safe and effective ways to whiten the teeth, which may help you look younger

By Kristin Vukovic

Teeth whitening is the number one requested cosmetic dental service today, according to the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry. Beyond the dental chair, Americans spend \$1.4 billion a year on over-the-counter teeth-whitening products. Our pearly whites are eating up a lot of green—and worse, some of these whiteners might not even be safe or effective.

As a coffee and red wine aficionado, I was on a mission to find natural alternatives to hydrogen peroxide whitening products and procedures. I also wanted to learn how to prevent teeth staining (while still indulging in my java and vino). To help me understand how our teeth get yellow and what we can do to prevent it, I reached out to Dr. Lewis Gross, a New York City-based holistic dentist and

graduate of Columbia University College of Dental Medicine.

“The bleaching process uses hydrogen peroxide, which has an affinity for protein,” says Dr. Gross. “It pulls protein stains [from coffee, wine, smoking] out of the enamel, which has little pits—imperfections in the surface.” He explains that these microscopic pit stains accumulate from ingesting brown or red foods, and when they aren't cleaned off regularly they make the teeth look yellow or brown. Bleaching makes teeth appear their whitest, but doesn't change their natural color.

I had heard that bleaching can make teeth sensitive and can strip away enamel, so I'd never pursued teeth whitening. “Enamel is the hardest structure in the body—it's harder than bone,” Dr. Gross says. “But the roots of the teeth are not enamel. [People's] teeth get sensitive because the salivary acidity has eroded their roots, and they have root exposure. The roots are porous; bleach gets into them and they get sensitive.”

So how do our mouths become acidic? Coffee, alcohol, cold medicines and antihistamines are drying agents that reduce saliva flow and increase acidity. “Even tap water is acidic,” Dr. Gross adds. He estimates that 50 percent of young people he sees today are acidic—in other words, their pH levels aren't balanced. Dr. Gross recommends drinking spring water with fresh lemon

juice or alkaline water to help control pH levels, in addition to eating earlier and refraining from drinking alcohol after dinner. For more information, he suggests reading *The Acid Alkaline Food Guide: A Quick Reference to Foods & Their Effect on pH Levels* (Square One Publishers) by Dr. Susan E. Brown and Larry Trivieri, Jr.

AYURVEDIC OIL PULLING

Oil pulling, an ancient Ayurvedic practice, has recently gained popularity as a teeth-whitening technique. “The idea of oil pulling is that you're washing your whole mouth,” Dr. Gross says. “The mouth can collect a lot of debris, and the oil pulls toxins through the skin of the mouth. It's cleaning out particles, food, fungi and bacteria, while lubricating tissues at the back of your throat.”

Dr. Gross recommends PurO3 ozonated coconut oil (puro3.com) and Artisana Raw 100% Organic Cold Pressed Extra Virgin Coconut Oil (iherb.com). First thing in the morning, swish two teaspoons of oil in your mouth for 20 minutes. Then spit out the oil, immediately rinse out your mouth with warm water (or warm salt water) and brush your teeth.

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keeping it clean

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