A BUYER’S GUIDE TO TOOTH WHITENING
What is Tooth Whitening?

Professional tooth whitening is an effective way of lightening the natural colour of your teeth without removing any of your tooth’s surface.

There are a number of reasons why you might get your teeth whitened. Everyone is different; and just as our hair and skin colour vary, so do our teeth. Very few people have brilliant-white teeth.

There are two types of tooth whitening, either in-surgery whitening or at-home whitening. Your dentist will be able to discuss with you which method would be best for you to achieve the result that you want.

Results will vary from person to person depending on the original colour of your teeth and your general lifestyle. You could expect that tooth whitening carried out by a dental professional to last for around 3 years before you need a top-up treatment.

What are the rules and regulations?

It’s fairly simple – tooth whitening is officially a dental procedure that should only be offered and carried out by qualified dental professionals, as ruled by the European Directive and confirmed by the High Court. This means that anybody carrying out tooth whitening other than a qualified dental professional is doing so illegally.

The law states that tooth whitening products containing or releasing between 0.1 and six per cent hydrogen peroxide can now only be sold to a registered dental professional offering the treatment in their practice.

Tooth whitening products or kits bought over the counter or via the internet can legally only contain up to 0.1 per cent hydrogen peroxide. However, this concentration is too low to have any noticeable effect on the colour of the teeth.

The legal age limit for tooth whitening is 18 years old.
Question Time

We appreciate there might be some questions you have about tooth whitening, so we’ve put together a few frequently asked questions and answers to put your mind at ease.

Q. Will it hurt?
A. Some people may experience some sensitivity. Others may experience slight white patches on the gum line, but these will disappear within a few days of treatment. Extreme sensitivity or burning of the gums is not normal. If you are in pain, visit the dentist immediately.

Q. What if I have fillings, veneers, crowns or dentures?
A. Tooth whitening will not work on any ‘false’ teeth such as veneers, crowns or dentures, nor will it whiten existing fillings. These may need to be replaced after tooth whitening to match the new colour of your teeth.

Q. Is the work guaranteed for a certain length of time?
A. If you avoid food and drink that may stain your teeth – red wine, curries, tea and coffee – it can last for up to three years.

Q. Who should I contact if I have problems following the treatment? What if I am not happy with the treatment?
A. There should be a written complaint procedure for you to follow if you are not happy with any aspect of your treatment.

Q. What kind of insurance do you have?
A. All dentists will have indemnity insurance. As it is illegal for anyone other than a dentist to carry out the tooth whitening procedure, anyone other than a dentist would not be able to take out any valid insurance to cover tooth whitening.
Some friendly advice…

Before you go and give your teeth a whiter future, here are a few things you should consider…

• If you do not get satisfactory answers to all of these questions, you should not go ahead with the treatment and seek further advice from your dentist.

• A qualified and registered dental professional will have a GDC number, which you can check at www.gdc-uk.org. If you want to make sure they can carry out the treatment, visit this website first.

• If the treatment says 'peroxide free', it still may not be safe. Check for sodium perborate and chlorine dioxide – these are potentially harmful.

• You cannot get whitening treatments on the NHS. Private charges will vary from practice to practice and region to region, so shop about for the best deal. If a friend has had their teeth whitened, speak to them too.

• Although they do not affect the natural colour of your teeth, whitening toothpastes may be effective at removing staining, helping to restore the natural colour of your teeth.

If you have any concerns about a product or someone you think is carrying out illegal tooth whitening, please visit www.safetoothwhitening.org and let the Tooth Whitening Information Group know.