

ZOOMING IN ON TEETH

There are few things as ageing as yellowing teeth. But how do you get the perfect, gleaming smile without subjecting yourself to uncomfortable and expensive hours in the dentist's chair? **Kathryn Kelly** thinks she knows the answer

One solution could be Zoom! Laser Whitening, a supposedly painless process that claims to deliver a dazzling, Hollywood-style grin in just one-and-a-half hours. Initially, I am a little sceptical about the benefits of such a treatment on my own teeth, which are naturally straight and white-ish (although it has to be said full of fillings following a childhood addiction to sherbert fountains and black jacks).

However, Mark Stewart, who runs the Dunedin Clinic near Exeter Airport, specialising in dental and cosmetic work, assures me that almost all natural teeth can benefit from Zoom! and significant whitening can be achieved in most cases.

"As we get older, tiny cracks appear on the surface of our teeth. These start to absorb the tannins in coffee, tea, red wine and food colourings, causing a build-up of stains. Of course, the problem is intensified if you smoke."

While I gave up the fags some years ago and have only a moderate caffeine intake. I am partial to curry and not averse to the odd glass or three of claret, so I decide to go for a bit of dental brightening as a precaution against ending up with gnashers the colour of chocolate.

Mark says the treatment is suitable for anyone from their twenties upward whose teeth are discoloured. "I advise patients who are considering veneers or other reconstructive work to try whitening first, as it is much less invasive and more economical."

However, he says, Zoom! is not intended to lighten artificial teeth,



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composite or other restorative work. He also points out that people with darkly stained yellow-brown teeth frequently achieve better results than people with grey or bluish-grey teeth.

Skill is needed to protect the gums, lips and cheeks from the powerful whitening agents and ultraviolet light that can burn the skin, but Mark tells me to relax as I'm in safe hands. He then puts a Hannibal-Lecter-type shield into my mouth to keep it open, before covering the soft tissues. A lip balm with an SPF of 30 is applied and a shield put over my eyes.

Primer and the bleaching gel are applied to the teeth before they are exposed to the UV machine in three 15-

minute blasts. There's no discomfort, although my face gets a bit warm and I find myself dribbling slightly.

The whole experience is the complete antithesis of my childhood memories of going to the dentist, when I had to be held down, screaming, in the chair. In fact, it would even have been quite relaxing if there'd been something to look at on the screen above my head (a nice George Clooney film would have gone down a treat!).

On the dental colour chart, my teeth go from being a mid-range C2 (apparently the colour of milky tea) to the whitest on the scale, a full six shades lighter. Meanwhile, the top teeth are transformed from a C1 to a snowy B1, up five shades. And the best bit is that it all looks completely natural.

I am advised not to drink coffee, tea or red wine and to avoid brightly coloured foods for a couple of days. The gums and teeth do become a little sensitive in the hours immediately after the treatment, but not unbearably so, and this wears off by the next morning.

I am heartened to know that although the teeth won't retain their pristine appearance indefinitely, the treatment could last for up to a year (depending, of course, on how much red wine and curry I consume). And when the brightness starts to dim a little, I intend to maintain the look by using a home bleaching kit. Anything that improves your smile has got to be worth a bit of effort. □

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