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Bride-to-be Joy Lim, 35, didn't pay much attention to her teeth until she started practising her smile for her impending photo shoot. She was shocked to find that her once pearly-whites were now an ashen yellow, thanks to years of imbibing coffee and cola. She tried smiling with her mouth closed but it came out looking more like a grimace. She needed a remedy and fast! Lucky for her, there's now a revolutionary teeth whitening treatment that's supposed to restore the lustre of your precious pearlys.

LIGHT, LIGHTER, WHITER

Said to be the gold standard in teeth whitening, the laser teeth whitening procedure is currently performed only by Dr Rex Tan of Smile Inc. Dental Surgeons.

This non-invasive treatment has evolved over the years in terms of improvements in light intensity and the chemicals used. The procedure is painless, safe and achieves quick results. A one-hour session once or twice a week lightens teeth by seven to 15 shades compared to DIY, off-the-shelf products that only whiten by two to three shades, says Dr Tan.

During the laser treatment, a bleaching material is placed on the teeth. The laser emits a precise wavelength that targets the teeth and activates the chemicals on it. This penetrates the tooth to remove the stain molecules, while leaving the enamel intact.

"We protect the soft tissues so only



The latest cosmetic dentistry treatments will have you beaming with confidence on your wedding day, says JANALIN TAN.

SMILE PLEASE!

the teeth are exposed," assures Dr Tan. "No injections are needed and there is no dehydration."

COUTURE SMILE

As long as she was having her teeth whitened, Joy decided to fix other problems like the gap between her front teeth and her chipped molars.

"What makes a nice smile is how you plan and design the smile," says Dr Tan. "If you have white but awfully shaped teeth, your smile will still be affected. You have to look at it in its entirety: How it goes with your facial shape, tone of the skin, and how the muscles of the smile work."

For brides with budgetary and time constraints, Dr Tan recommends The Smile Inc. Makeover which addresses various teeth problems (unevenness, gaps, chips, etc.). It takes an hour and costs under \$1,000. Adds Dr Tan, "It's not complicated. It can be as easy as contouring a few teeth to change a person's entire look." The end result: A designer, couture smile.

WHITES OUT THERE

Other in-office whitening technologies on the market are Britesmile, Rembrandt Sapphire Light Technology and Zoom! Whitening System. These cost upwards of \$900 and usually take about an hour.

They all use a patented light technology combined with a specially formulated hydrogen peroxide-based gel to lighten teeth. Most come with a take-home brush-on kit for maintenance.

The light intensity here differs from that of laser whitening, so effectiveness varies. Generally, patients see improvements of six to seven shades. Some may complain of slight discomfort during treatment.

For those with a "dentist phobia", off-the-shelf products are a good alternative. These include pre-filled bleach trays, whitening toothpaste and gels, whitening sticks and strips, and paint-on bleaching gels. The active ingredient here is hydrogen peroxide. Costing between \$8 and \$150, they're easier to handle and cheaper than treatments at the dentist.

"They do work for mild stains – if used consistently," says Dr Asha Karan of Smilemakers Dental Clinic. "After a session of dentist-prescribed whitening, DIY kits can serve as a superficial 'touch-up'."

As it may take a few weeks to see results, users sometimes go overboard by brushing constantly or applying more of the product than necessary, in the hopes of seeing results.

"Some of these products may contain abrasive agents that scratch the enamel, causing more stains in the long run," cautions Dr Tan.

KEEP SMILING

Another thing to be aware of is that the one-size-fits-all trays and strips may irritate gums and soft tissues due to chemical leakage. Also, the bleach may get licked off

by accident, which will render the product ineffective.

Before you go out and buy any product, it's important to check with your dentist if teeth-whitening is suitable for your particular problem.

For example, an isolated, dark-coloured tooth may be a dead, not discoloured, tooth. If so, root canal treatment is needed. Sometimes, discolouration may be due to surface stains that can be removed by professional cleaning.

Also bear in mind that teeth tend to darken with age, so that's something you can't do much about.

For a start, stay away from things that stain your teeth such as nicotine, wine, cola, coffee, tea, soya sauce and curry.

After all, it's never too late to start cultivating good habits that will help you achieve a beautiful smile.

3 steps to plump up lips

What's the first thing that comes to mind when you think of Angelina Jolie? Is it those trademark, bee-stung lips that have sent many a leading man's heart aflutter? Beautiful lips and great teeth are essential for a megawatt smile – but they need work to keep them in tip-top shape.

"Lips are as delicate as the eye area. They don't have sweat or oil glands, so they are prone to dehydration," says Kellye Kim, communications manager of FANCL Asia. "This explains why the lips are the first to dry out in air-conditioned rooms or to get painfully chapped and peel during the winter months if not properly moisturised."



- 1 Apply a thick layer of oil-based lip treatment before bed.
- 2 Protect lips from moisture loss by using a lip balm with SPF. Apply lipstick or sheer gloss over the balm as it tends to be drying.
- 3 At the end of the day, remove lip colour thoroughly because colour residue harms the lips. Do a lip treatment once or twice a month.