

Crest's 6 Percent Solution

New Peroxide-Treated Strips Promise a Less Messy Way to Make Teeth a Little Whiter

Who wouldn't want whiter teeth? Yellow and other stains on the incisors are like dingy signs advertising our vices: coffee consumption, cigarette smoking, lackluster brushing and (not a vice, but still) growing old.

In launching Crest Whitestrips directly to consumers, Procter & Gamble is betting that people will pay a pretty penny to get bright teeth without the gak and spittle of kits that use trays to hold whitening solutions. P&G's system features transparent plastic strips that are affixed to the upper and lower front teeth for 30 minutes twice daily. Cumbersome tray systems, say the folks at Crest, allow the peroxide solution to become easily diluted (and swallowed), rendering them less effective than the strips.

Whitestrips, available at your grocery store or pharmacy in 56-count boxes—a two-week supply—will set you back \$44. Rembrandt Plus, a competitor, costs \$32.50; most of the over-the-counter (OTC) gel-and-tray whiteners cost about half that.

Of course, \$44 is a spit in the basin compared to what the average Washington area dentist will charge you for standard tray-based whitening—from \$300 to, if lasers are involved, \$600.

In Whitestrips, as in other whiteners, hydrogen peroxide is the active ingredient. But Whitestrips' purported



COURTESY CREST

With 30-minute, twice-daily applications of Whitestrips, you can buff up your smile—for a price.

advantage is its ability to keep the bleaching agent in prolonged contact with the stained teeth long enough for the peroxide to permeate the enamel (home of superficial, more easily removed stains) to reach the underlying dentin, where the tough stains reside.

Whitestrips topped the list of whitening products in a February study conducted by the independent dental-product testing organization Clinical Research Associates (CRA), winning high marks for ease of use—though all the products tested made teeth two shades whiter in two

weeks. As for safety, hydrogen peroxide is considered safe for teeth, though its use often irritates gums and other soft tissue and sometimes makes teeth temporarily more sensitive.

What do dentists think? Eugene Giannini, a spokesman for the District of Columbia Dental Society, says that, as long as his patients understand the limited effectiveness of any whitening treatment, he is comfortable using Whitestrips, particularly as a lower-cost option for teenagers or as a touch-up after professional tray whitening. Having tried the product himself, he says the biggest drawback is that the strips slide around a bit, and—as CRA also notes—they cover only the front few teeth (a fact P&G discloses).

Perhaps anticipating a backlash should dentists find Whitestrips cutting into their profitable tooth-whitening gigs, P&G is also marketing a version available only from dentists. This product features a 6.5 percent hydrogen peroxide solution, rather than the standard 6 percent, and a three-week, rather than a two-week, supply of strips. P&G sells these kits, which promise to whiten teeth 43 percent better than the OTC product, to dentists for \$20. It recommends that dentists offer them to patients for \$55 to \$65.

—Jennifer Huet