



Does CHARCOAL *really lighten your teeth?*

BY DR. SUSAN MAPLES

The answer is no, unless you have unsightly stains for which you need something like charcoal to abrade it off. But it comes at a cost to your enamel.

I consistently see patients who are seeking solutions to their everyday oral and systemic health concerns. People want to have more energy, avoid cardiovascular disease, prevent cancer, sleep better and lose weight — oh, and enhance their smile.

What are the benefits of cosmetic dentistry?

I hear a litany of smile complaints, and most of them are completely fixable. Whether someone wants to straighten crooked teeth, reduce a gummy smile or lengthen teeth to show more when the talk or smile, almost everyone wants to lighten and brighten their smile.

As it turns out, people who feel better about their smile and flash it with confidence literally increase their happiness from the outside in. While counter-intuitive sounding, research confirms that engaging smile-muscles releases serotonin and oxytocin; the two biggest mood elevators. Plus, people respond to smilers more positively, which doubly strengthens social confidence.

So, what about charcoal?

Social media has gone nuts around the idea of brushing your teeth with charcoal. It's an abrasive and absorptive material that can remove tough stains. But you'll be disappointed to realize that if you don't have visible stains from tobacco, cannabis, coffee or tea, then you're barking up the wrong tree. If you do have stains, the dental office is your friend, not charcoal.

Here's why: picture your enamel as a bundle of microscopic, tiny glass straws. Displaying capillary action — just like thin cocktail straws — these enamel rods suck up material from the environment. Some foods, drinks and smoke-deposit stains you can only remove with an abrasive, like the fine polishing pumice in a dental office ... or charcoal. Both of which are abrasive to the tiny glass tubules.

Unfortunately, enamel is the only part of the ectoderm that does not replenish or heal itself—once it's gone, it's gone. You can color your hair, pierce your skin, damage your nail and shave your eyebrow—all of that comes back. Not your enamel!

Furthermore, the thinner the enamel gets, the yellower teeth look, because it exposes more of the color-rich deeper layer called the *dentin*. For this and other health reasons, protecting your precious enamel is critically important.

State of the Art Brightening.

We have developed chemical peroxide-based products that are readily sucked up through the glass tubules to lighten the shade of the dentin. There are several different delivery methods, but the research continues to support custom-fitted trays and professionally dispensed brightening gel for at-home use. Granted, there are some quick-start methods that require an office visit and perhaps UV lights, but this boost is associated with enamel dehydration. While you might walk away with a perceived color change, you will see significant relapse over the next few days. Most of these treatments include the take-home, custom tray method, which is where you'll experience significant and long-lasting brightening. So, why pay more for the quick-start?

When you love your smile, don't throw away your trays. As we age, our dentin gradually continues to yellow, but with a few applications every year or two, you can keep your teeth bright for a lifetime.

Treat your teeth like the jewels they are. Trust your hygienist and dentist to remove ugly stains and professionally brighten your smile.



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