

Benefits Spotlight

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Q&A with Dr. Jeff: What Is laser dentistry?

Of all the dental trends that pop up, laser dentistry might be the most futuristic. But is laser dentistry safe and effective?

Dr. Jeffrey Chaffin, chief dental officer at Delta Dental of Iowa, answers top questions about this dental trend.

Q: What is laser dentistry?

Dr. Chaffin: Laser dentistry is an emerging treatment that essentially uses a laser to replace the dental drill and/or a scalpel blade. The same dental procedure is performed, but it relies on a laser rather than the traditional tool.

Q: What are the benefits of laser dentistry over traditional dentistry? Any downsides?

Dr. Chaffin: One of the biggest benefits of laser dentistry is comfort. Patients report less pain and discomfort with the use of lasers. Plus, healing times seem to be faster when a laser is used compared with traditional instruments. There is also a lower chance of the patient developing a bacterial infection and having tissue damage when a laser is used.

The biggest concern over lasers is the additional cost. The laser “machines” are expensive, and dentists are likely to pass some of that cost back to the patient.

Q: Is laser dentistry safe?

Dr. Chaffin: Yes, laser dentistry is safe. Protective eyewear for the patient and clinical staff is very important to prevent any eye injury.

Q: How can I tell whether my dentist is a credible laser dentistry provider?

Dr. Chaffin: Before treating patients with a laser, dentists normally go through significant additional training. Patients should feel empowered to talk about that training with their dentist, so don't hesitate to ask before undergoing a laser procedure.

Q: What types of dental procedures can be done via laser dentistry?

Dr. Chaffin: One of the biggest uses of lasers is to treat gum problems. Lasers can recontour the gums to be more cosmetic and functional. Another common use for lasers is to treat “tongue tied” children – where the laser is used to cut a small piece of tissue called the frenum under the tongue. Additional uses for lasers in dentistry include finding cavities, filling cavities and teeth whitening.

Q: Does laser dentistry cost more than traditional dentistry?

Dr. Chaffin: Patients should have conversations with their dentist about the cost of laser dentistry. Usually, new technology tends to cost more, so knowing the cost before you undergo the procedure is important to prevent any billing surprises.

Q: What patients are particularly good candidates for laser dentistry?

Dr. Chaffin: Some of the best candidates are those with gum disease who want reduced recovery time with less pain.

What's up with white spots on teeth?

Tooth discoloration can be frustrating, but much of it is easy to explain. If your teeth are yellowing, it may be from smoking, regularly consuming tea or coffee, or simply aging. But what about those pesky white spots, marks or stripes that can pepper a tooth? Where do they come from?

White spots on teeth can be caused by several different things. Here are five top causes of white spots on teeth and what you can do to even out your tooth shade.

1. **Excess fluoride:** This cause is often associated with children, as consuming too much fluoride (through eating toothpaste, for example) or using too much toothpaste on a tooth before it entirely breaks through the surface of the gums can cause discolored lines across the middle or bottom of the tooth. Your dentist can help you determine how much and what type of toothpaste your child should use to help prevent consuming excess fluoride. Fortunately, these white lines are merely cosmetic and pose no health risk to your child.
2. **Medications:** All medicines have side effects, and some can affect your oral health. Medications that have been linked to white spots on teeth include antibiotics, antihistamines, high blood pressure medications and certain mouth rinses. If you notice white spots on your teeth and suspect they are related to a medication, do not stop taking the medication. First, call your dentist to determine if the medicine is actually leading to your tooth discoloration. If it is, call your doctor to discuss the side effect and explore any alternatives.
3. **Dry mouth:** Dry mouth is another possible cause of white spots on your teeth. As the name suggests, dry mouth means that your mouth isn't producing a healthy amount of saliva. Dry mouth can cause several oral health problems, if left untreated, and one of them is demineralization. When the mineral content of the tooth wears away, plaque can build up and teeth can dry out, which can result in white spots on your teeth.
4. **Plaque:** When you don't brush and floss each day, plaque builds up on your teeth. Excess plaque is one of the causes of discolored teeth. Fortunately, good oral hygiene – keeping up with your twice yearly dental appointments and twice daily brushing and flossing – will keep plaque from building up on your teeth and will reverse the appearance of off-color spots and streaks.

5. **Reduced enamel:** Some people have less enamel on their teeth than the average person, which is known as enamel hypoplasia. People with nutritional deficiencies and premature babies are susceptible to enamel hypoplasia, which often first shows itself as white spots on teeth and eventually can develop into pits in the teeth. Enamel hypoplasia puts you at risk for tooth decay, so your dentist will want to add an extra layer of protection onto your teeth through treatments including sealants and fillings.

Treating white spots depends on the cause

If you're curious about the white spots on your teeth and want to explore solutions, talk to your dentist. Your dentist will help you understand what's causing your teeth discoloration and will recommend a treatment to even the shade of your teeth.

If you need to find a dentist near you, Delta Dental of Iowa can help. Use our [Find a Provider](#) tool to find in-network dentists who can help determine what's causing white spots on your teeth and recommend a treatment.