

FLUOROSIS, MOTTLED ENAMEL, and WHITE SPOTS

Fluorosis and Mottled Enamel

Fluoride is the dental marvel of our lifetime and a definite benefit to the oral health of our nation. But too much of a good thing can cause problems! Fluorosis of the teeth and mottled enamel can occur when there is too much fluoride uptake by the teeth while the teeth are forming. Prescription fluoride vitamins of the proper dosage are normally given to children. But a child can get too much fluoride if it's available from multiple sources. Children with access to a public water system containing fluoride may also be prescribed fluoride supplements or they may swallow fluoride-containing toothpastes, mouth rinses, or certain fruit drinks, which may increase their fluoride intake above recommended levels. Fluorosis is a condition in which teeth form with unsightly dark spots on them. Some medications and illnesses can also cause a similar problem. These dark spots, most often seen on the permanent teeth, are not more prone to decay, just unattractive. One, several, or all of the teeth can be affected. The color change (usually brown/orange or flat/opaque white) can be mild, moderate or severe.

Treatment Options

Generally speaking, three solutions are possible. Sometimes the stain is very superficial and can be merely polished off. It does not return. There is no pain involved in this procedure. The enamel is simply polished and made smooth again.

Many times it is quite easy to whiten the brown spots to match the surrounding tooth color. This is most often an in-office procedure (as opposed to whitening yellow teeth, which can be done at home with custom-made tooth-whitening trays). Strong whitening chemicals are placed on the dark area and activated by light or heat or both. Several applications (in the same visit) are done, and the spot usually disappears in one visit!

If the spot is very dark or goes deep into the enamel, the whitening may work, but not enough to remove the total discoloration. In this instance, a combination of whitening and a bonded composite tooth-colored restoration will solve the problem. The tooth is whitened, and then the remaining dark area is prepared (drilled) to receive a bonded-type filling. The nature color of the tooth is matched and a resin is bonded into the prepared section. The color match can be nearly perfect, and patients see a big improvement over what was there before.

White Spots

White spots on teeth can also be caused by too much fluoride, illness, medication, or an interruption of the proper enamel formation. The spots may be barely visible, or they may contrast with the surrounding tooth. If the teeth dry out, as in the case of a patient who routinely breathes through his or her mouth, the white spots become quite prominent. Most of the time, these spots can be simply polished off. If they go too deep into the tooth, however, they must be restored with tooth preparation and bonding of a tooth-colored material. Once removed, they do not return. White spots affect the permanent teeth more than baby teeth. While they cannot be bleached out, as can fluorosis discolorations, whitening of all the teeth may make them less noticeable.

The best solution to your problem will be discussed with you during your examination.

If you have any questions about fluorosis, mottled enamel, or white spots, please feel free to ask us.