

## yourhealth

When Russell Fraser bought a tooth-whitening kit on the internet he had no idea of the damage he would do to his teeth and gums or how much it would cost to repair. MELANIE WHITEHOUSE reports on his struggle

**R**USSELL FRASER was delighted after his teeth were whitened by his dentist two years ago. "As part of my work as an IT consultant, I meet a lot of clients and decided white teeth would give me a better appearance," he says.

"They were only slightly stained before the treatment but afterwards they were brilliant. It cost £500 but I was thrilled with the result."

Almost a year later, though, his perfect smile had started to dull and he decided to top up the previous treatment - this time by buying a kit over the internet.

"I was very busy at work and I thought it would be quicker," he explains. "The kit I chose had a UK website address and the sales pitch said it would give me a fabulous smile and brighten my teeth. It never entered my head that I'd be taking a risk."

Russell followed the instructions to the letter. The firm seemed responsible - he had to take an impression of his teeth with a malleable material that he returned to the company and in return they sent him made-to-measure gum shields and a tooth-whitening liquid.

"I filled the gumshields with the liquid and left them in overnight," recalls Russell. "In the morning I took them out. My teeth were throbbing so badly I almost went to casualty. After about 16 hours the pain wore off."

"I kept checking my teeth in the mirror but the damage appeared gradually. About two weeks later I noticed the top of my teeth under the gum line had gone darker. I used a dentist's mirror to look at the back of my teeth and they'd gone completely brown."

"It was the dentine showing - the enamel had worn away because of what I later discovered was acid erosion. I was horrified. My teeth had also shrunk. They were literally falling apart."

Mervyn Druian, a dentist with a cosmetic practice in central London, says that chlorine dioxide has been used for years in dentistry in toothpastes and rinses.

"It is a very weak bleach but isn't normally used for tooth whitening," he explains. "It does whiten teeth but it's mainly used for treating bad breath."

"I am sure there was some acid in the product Russell used because it sounds like he suffered an acid attack on his teeth. Over-the-counter products are often acid-based. He was obviously using something that had not been tested."

A spokesperson for the British Dental Association says: "The amount of bleach in tooth whitening kits can vary from very low to excessive. If you buy products over the internet there are no controls. At the moment, the European Union is deciding what is an effective level and what's a safe level."

It says that bleaching is not suitable for everyone, especially those with gum disease or crowns. "We strongly advise people to go



SPARKLING FORM: Russell's smile after extensive dental work

# Teething troubles

first to their dentist who can assess their suitability for tooth whitening and advise on products used."

Too embarrassed to ring his own dentist, Russell, from Pitlochry in Scotland, rang another one for a quote to remedy the damage. He was told he would need crowns rather than veneers and they would cost many thousands of pounds.

"The next step was to look for a cheaper option, so I searched the internet and came across a clinic in Budapest in Hungary," he says. "I sent photographs of my teeth and was told it would cost £8,500."

"In May I went to Budapest for treatment at the Smile Savers clinic. The first day I spent 12½ hours in the dentist's chair. The next session was four hours and the follow-up two hours."

Russell's treatment included 21 fillings, four root-canal treatments and 18 crowns.

"It was a huge job but I was pleased in the end. Friends and family thought I was crazy to go abroad but I have no regrets. When I got home I asked my normal dentist what it would have cost and they said more than £28,000."

Russell is still angry about what happened. He won't name the firm or take legal action. "To anybody who's tempted by a tooth whitening kit, I would say, don't risk it - go to a dentist," he says.

● Smile Savers: 0845 338 6278/0800 0470  
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