

How do I choose and use a toothbrush?

Angled heads, raised bristles, oscillating tufts and handles that change colors with use: you name it; toothbrushes come in all shapes, colors and sizes, promising to perform better than the rest. But no body of scientific evidence exists yet to show that any one type of toothbrush design is better at removing plaque than another. The only thing that matters is that you brush your teeth. Many just don't brush long enough. Most people brush less than a minute, but to effectively reach all areas and scrub off cavity-causing bacteria, it is recommended to brush for two to three minutes.

Which toothbrush is best?

In general, a toothbrush head should be small (1" by 1/2") for easy access to all areas of the mouth, teeth and gums. It should have a long, wide handle for a firm grasp. It should have soft nylon bristles with rounded ends so you won't hurt your gums.

When should I change my toothbrush?

Be sure to change your toothbrush or toothbrush head (if you're using an electric toothbrush) before the bristles become splayed and frayed. Not only are old toothbrushes ineffective, but they may harbor harmful bacteria that can cause infection such as gingivitis and periodontitis. Toothbrushes should be changed every three to four months. Sick people should change their toothbrush at the beginning of an illness and after they feel better.

How do I brush?

Place the toothbrush beside your teeth at a 45-degree angle and rub back-and-forth gently. Brush outside the teeth, inside the tooth, your tongue, and especially brush on chewing surfaces and between teeth. Be sure to brush at least twice a day, especially after meals.

How long should I brush my teeth?

You should brush your teeth at least 2 to 3 minutes twice a day. Brush your teeth for the length of a song on the radio, the right amount of time to get the best results from brushing. Unfortunately, most Americans only brush for 45 to 70 seconds twice a day.

Electric vs. manual toothbrushes

Electric toothbrushes don't work that much better than manual toothbrushes, but they do motivate some reluctant brushers to clean their teeth more often. The whizzing sounds of an electric toothbrush and the tingle of the rotary tufts swirling across teeth and gums often captivate people who own electric toothbrushes. They are advantageous because they can cover more area faster. Electric toothbrushes are recommended for people who have limited manual dexterity, such as a disabled or elderly person and those who wear braces.

Sometimes, it takes more time and effort to use an electric toothbrush because batteries must be recharged, and it must be cleaned after every use. Most electric toothbrushes have rechargeable batteries that take 10 to 45 minutes to recharge. The gearing in an electric toothbrush occasionally must be lubricated with water. Prices range from \$30 to \$99.

How do electric toothbrushes work?

Electric toothbrushes generally work by using tufts of nylon bristles to stimulate gums and clean teeth in an oscillating or rotary motion. Some tufts are arranged in a circular pattern, while others have the traditional shape of several bristles lined up on a row. While first using an electric toothbrush expect some bleeding from your gums. The bleeding will stop when you learn to control the brush and your gums become healthier. Children under 10 should be supervised when using an electric toothbrush. Avoid mashing the tufts against your teeth in an effort to clean them. Use light force and slow movements, and allow the electric bristle action to do its job.

How long have toothbrushes been used?

The first toothbrush was invented in China in 1000 A.D. It was an ivory handled toothbrush with bristles made from a horse's mane. Toothbrushes became popular in the 19th century among the Victorian affluent. Mass marketing and the advent of nylon bristles in the 20th century made toothbrushes inexpensive and available to everyone.

Don't forget...

Visit your dentist regularly because tooth brushing and flossing is most effective with periodic checkups and cleanings.

Toothpaste:

Why is brushing with toothpaste important?

Brushing with toothpaste (also called a "dentifrice") is important for several reasons. First and foremost, a toothpaste and a correct brushing action work to remove plaque, a sticky, harmful film of bacteria that grows on your teeth that causes caries, gum disease, and eventual tooth loss if not controlled. Second, the toothpaste contains fluoride, which makes the entire tooth structure more resistant to decay and promotes remineralization, which aids in repairing early decay before the damage can even be seen. Third, special ingredients in the dentifrice help to clean and polish the teeth and remove stains over time. Fourth, toothpastes help freshen breath and leave your mouth with a clean feeling.

What type of toothpaste should I use?

As long as your toothpaste contains fluoride, the brand you buy really does not matter, whether or not it is in paste, gel, or even powder form, or containing a certain flavor. All fluoride dentifrices work effectively to fight plaque and cavities and clean and polish tooth enamel. Your dentifrice brand should also bear the ADA (American Dental Association) seal

of approval on the container, which means that adequate evidence of safety and efficacy have been demonstrated in controlled, clinical trials.

If your teeth are hypersensitive to hot or cold, consider trying toothpaste designed for sensitive teeth.

Dentifrices containing baking soda and/or hydrogen peroxide (which are both good cleansing agents) give the teeth and mouth a clean, fresh, pleasant feeling that can offer an incentive to brush more, but fluoride is the true active ingredient at work protecting your teeth. Some prefer a tartar control toothpaste containing pyrophosphates to prevent the buildup of soft calculus deposits on their teeth. New pastes offer advanced whitening formulas aimed at safely removing stains to make teeth brighter and shinier, although *they* can't nearly match the effectiveness of a professional bleaching formula administered or prescribed by a dentist.

How much should I use?

Contrary to what toothpaste commercials show, the amount of paste or gel needed on your brush for effective cleaning does not have to be a heaping amount. Simply squeeze on a pea-sized dab of paste on the top half of your brush. If you brush correctly, holding the toothbrush at a 45-degree angle and brush inside, outside and between your teeth, the paste should foam enough to cover all of your teeth.

Children under six, however, should be given a very small, baby pea-sized dab of dentifrice on their brush.

Is brushing with toothpaste enough to fight cavities and gum disease?

No. Although brushing thoroughly after each meal helps, flossing your teeth every day to remove plaque and food particles between teeth and at the gumline is just as important. Studies show that plaque will regrow on teeth that are completely clean within 3 to 4 hours of brushing.