



Cleaning Your Teeth

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Why do we need to brush our teeth?

Toothbrushing is carried out to remove the sticky bacteria that form a harmful film on the teeth (dental plaque). These bacteria cause gum disease which is the most common disease in the World. The bacteria also act on sticky sweet foods forming acid that causes tooth decay.

What type of brush is best?

When buying a toothbrush choose a small-headed medium strength brush that has a comfortable handle to grip. You need to replace the brush about every three months.

Electric brushes

If you want an electric brush choose one that meets your needs. There are many types available, some have timers, others are battery operated and some are mains operated. Small-headed ones are better if you have a small mouth. They are very efficient at cleaning if used correctly and are good for people who have a problem with dexterity. Electric brushes should be used following the manufacturers instructions.

How to use your toothbrush

Place the toothbrush head where the tooth meets the gum so that the bristles are just in the cuff of gum around the tooth. Start at one side of the mouth and carefully brush round to the next side using small gentle back and forth strokes. Do not scrub hard, as this will damage the teeth and gums. Use this technique on the outer surfaces near the cheeks and on the inner surfaces near the tongue and around the palate. Finish by brushing the chewing surfaces. If you watch yourself brushing in the mirror then you can check that you do not miss any of the teeth. Brushing correctly should take about two minutes.

Which toothpaste?

There are many different brands of toothpaste in the shops and nearly all of them contain fluoride. Fluoride is very important because it strengthens the teeth against decay. There are also toothpastes that help if you have sensitive teeth when eating something hot or cold and others that work against the harmful bacteria. You only need to use a pea size amount of paste as too much may cause a lot of foaming.

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Cleaning between teeth

Although brushing removes most of the dental plaque there is usually some left between the teeth where the brush does not reach. It is very important to use another product to remove all the plaque.

There are specially designed brushes for cleaning between the teeth that look like small bottle brushes. They come in different widths so that they fill the spaces between your teeth. They should be pushed gently between the teeth with a back and forth movement held next to the gum. They should never be forced through, as this will damage the teeth.

There are also brushes that have a single tuft and these are useful to clean around crowded teeth and orthodontic appliances (braces).

Dental floss is a special thread that is used for cleaning in-between the teeth. The floss comes in different widths and most people find the thicker floss (tape) easier to use.

Take about 50cm of floss and wrap it around the second finger of each hand leaving a small piece to work with. Using your thumb and index finger pass the floss between the teeth and hold it in a 'c' shape round the tooth. Gently move it up and down wiping off the plaque. Repeat this between each tooth using a fresh piece of floss by winding it on round your fingers.

As with brushing it is very helpful to watch your technique in a mirror to ensure you do not cause any damage to the gums.

Flossing is a difficult technique and with all mouth care it is a good idea to ask for guidance from a dentist or dental hygienist.

It is important to visit the dentist regularly to check that your mouth is healthy and that any problems can be dealt with before they become serious.

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