

ORAL CARE PRODUCTS

Q What do I need to clean my teeth properly?

A There are many different oral care products available today. Your dentist or hygienist will be able to recommend the best toothbrush and toothpaste for you to use, as well as the best way to clean between your teeth.

It is important to always use a good toothbrush, a toothpaste which is suitable for your needs and, in most cases, something to clean between your teeth.

Q Which is the best toothbrush to use?

A It is usually recommended that adults should choose a toothbrush which is small to medium sized with multi-tufted, soft to medium filaments (bristles). These filaments should be round ended and made from nylon. This is important so that you do not damage your teeth or gums with any sharp bristles.

Q Are electric toothbrushes a good idea?

A Some people prefer to use an electric toothbrush. This is especially useful if you have limited movement or find cleaning particularly difficult. These toothbrushes usually have heads which either vibrate or move round and round. Some brushes also use sonic waves to help dislodge plaque and debris. You can buy electric toothbrushes in battery or rechargeable form from your local chemist or electrical retailer.

Q Which toothbrush cleans better, electric or manual?

A Electric toothbrushes have been proven to be at least 25% more effective than manual toothbrushes. If you are unsure, ask your dentist or hygienist for the best one to suit your dental needs.

Q What about children's toothbrushes?

A It is just as important for children to use the correct oral hygiene products. Look for a small-headed toothbrush with soft nylon bristles suitable for the age of your child. There are many novelty

toothbrushes for children, which may help encourage them to brush. If in doubt, look for products accredited by the British Dental Health Foundation. This means the claims on the packaging are proven to be correct.

Q Do I need to help my child to brush their teeth?

A Yes, children need to be supervised with their toothbrushing until they are about 7 years old. It is important to make toothbrushing a routine and to stress the importance of oral hygiene and diet from an early age.

Q How often should I clean my teeth?

A It is important to clean your teeth at least twice a day, especially last thing at night. Usually two minutes is enough to remove plaque and clean properly. Some people find using a stop-watch or timer useful as two minutes is often longer than you think. If you eat or drink certain foods you may need to clean more often.

Q What toothpastes are there?

A There are several toothpastes available which are designed for different needs. There are toothpastes for gum health, sensitive teeth, those for smokers, those with anti-bacterial agents, and others which claim to whiten the teeth. Your dentist will tell you and your family the most suitable toothpaste for your needs.

Q What about fluoride toothpastes?

A Most toothpastes contain a certain amount of fluoride, which has been proven to reduce dental decay considerably. Most dentists recommend using a fluoride toothpaste to prevent decay.

Q Should my child use a fluoride toothpaste?

A Yes. Fluoride has been proven to reduce dental decay by at least 40%, so all children should be encouraged to use a fluoride toothpaste. Fluoride may be in your drinking water, so check with your dentist first. Research has shown that children living in a non-fluoridated area have more dental decay than those living in areas with fluoride in the drinking water.

It is important to use only a small pea-sized amount of toothpaste for children, as they are likely to swallow some of it. For children under the age of six you can use a toothpaste with a lower level of fluoride.

Q **My teeth are stained, what toothpaste should I use?**

A There are toothpastes which claim to remove staining. They sometimes contain bicarbonate of soda, which will help to remove any staining and dental plaque. These are often referred to as whitening toothpastes. It is important to realise that such toothpastes will only remove staining and will not change the natural colour of your teeth. If you feel you need something stronger to whiten your teeth, then speak to your dentist about how this could be done.

Q **If I smoke, are there any toothpastes which can help?**

A If you are a smoker, you may find your teeth are more likely to be stained and you will therefore need more help. There are special smokers' toothpastes that will remove staining which can build up over a period of time. Your dentist or hygienist can help by professionally cleaning your teeth regularly.

Q **My teeth are sensitive, what can I use?**

A There are several toothpastes that contain 'desensitising agents' which do effectively reduce the pain of sensitive teeth and gums. Some people find rubbing this toothpaste along the affected area and leaving it on overnight helps ease the discomfort.

Q **Are natural toothpastes available?**

A Yes, there are several toothpastes containing special mineral salts and plant extracts. They are made of only natural substances and flavouring. Some produce the products without animal

testing and they are therefore suitable for vegetarians and vegans.

Q **What are 'total care' toothpastes?**

A Total care toothpastes are those that contain a number of ingredients to make them an effective multi-action toothpaste. They contain anti-bacterial agents and ingredients which help control plaque, dental decay and gum disease, while also freshening the breath.

Q **What about cleaning between my teeth?**

A Brushing alone only cleans about 60% of the surface of your teeth, so it is therefore important that you also clean between your teeth every time you brush. Your dentist or hygienist will be able to show you how.

Q **What is dental floss?**

A The most common way to clean between teeth is with dental floss or tape. Many people prefer tape to floss, as it is wider and can be gentler on the gums. There are several different types of floss or tape, including mint-flavoured, wax-coated and those containing fluoride.

Q **Are there any other products to help me clean between my teeth?**

A To clean the small gaps between your teeth you can also use wood sticks or special interdental brushes. Ask your dentist or hygienist for advice on how to use these products correctly and safely.

Q **I have a bridge, how can I clean underneath it?**

A It is just as important to keep this area clean as it is your natural teeth. You may be more likely to get trapped food and plaque there. Floss threaders may help guide the floss under the bridge. Some floss has a thicker spongy centre, which may also help to clean under the bridge and gum area effectively.

Q **Should I use a mouthwash?**

A Many people use a mouthwash as part of their daily oral health routine. They are usually used to help freshen breath, but they also help to dislodge any food debris. Some

mouthwashes contain an anti bacterial agent to help reduce gum disease and to control plaque.

Q Why do some mouthwashes contain alcohol?

A Some mouthwashes contain alcohol for a number of reasons. It helps to enhance the taste, helps in the cleansing action and adds to the antibacterial effect. However, some people find alcohol mouthwashes too strong and prefer a milder alternative that is alcohol free. Mouthwashes containing alcohol should be kept away from children.

Q Are there any mouthwashes for gum problems?

A Some mouthwashes, especially those containing Chlorhexidine, are particularly effective at treating gum infections and other oral problems, such as those following a dental extraction. These mouthwashes must be used in moderation and not used over a long period of time. This is because they can cause staining, although this can be easily removed by the dental hygienist. Make sure you follow the manufacturer's instructions at all times.

Q What about 'total care' mouthwashes?

A Some mouthwashes contain anti-bacterial agents which work against the oral bacteria responsible for producing unpleasant odours and plaque. Some total care mouthwashes contain a variety of ingredients. They help in controlling plaque, dental decay and gum inflammation.

Q Is there anything special to look for?

A There are so many different oral health products available that it is often difficult to choose the best ones for you. If you are looking for a specific oral hygiene product, it is important to find the right product for you.

The British Dental Health Foundation has an accreditation scheme which checks the claims made by manufacturers. Look out for the BDHF logo on packaging, which shows that the claims on the packaging have been clinically proven and the product does what it says.