

QUIT BRUSHING YOUR TEETH

What every Patient needs to know about tooth brushing
Or my opinions after three decades of experience
on what your parents/teachers/dentists/hygienists failed to teach you.

Probably one of the most damaging and lingering problems facing dental patients throughout their life results from teaching five year old children how to brush their teeth. We should instead teach children how to brush their gums!

Now that you have recovered from that shock, here's what happens. Teeth are brushed properly only when the patient concentrates on brushing the gums and teeth in an up and down motion. What we do when we teach five year olds to "brush their teeth" is we allow them to saw back and forth on their baby teeth, the only motion a five year old is capable of mastering in oral hygiene.

So, what happens when the permanent teeth erupt? Most adults still have habits that are related to brushing the baby teeth they have long since lost. If you live long enough, a bad brushing habit will eventually cost you your teeth. How? Fortunately, most people in general are most susceptible to decay only during two periods of their life, before 20 years of age, and after fifty years of age. When permanent teeth erupt, they go through a hardening stage that lasts for several years, and makes the teeth more resistant to decay by age 20. What happens after fifty years of age? Not only age, but any disease that affects the immune system, depression, diabetes, asthma, high blood pressure, etc, can promote serious decay, particularly at the gum line.

Solutions? To make a long story short, the patient must concentrate on brushing their gums AND TEETH in an up and down motion. While some patients can relearn how to brush with a manual tooth brush, the easiest solution lies in breaking the habit by switching to an electric toothbrush. We tell our patients that they will not break the habit of bad brushing unless they brush in an unfamiliar place, anywhere but standing in front of the bathroom mirror. Looking in the mirror is pointless. You simply cannot see over 80% of the areas that need to be brushed. (The shower is the best place for oral hygiene.) While the little pink tablets help, patients must re-learn to brush their teeth by "feel". They must feel the tooth brush follow ALL of the tooth gum lines with the brush. The new Listerine "Cool Blue" mouthrinse also helps. Any place that accumulates plaque will show up. Learn how to brush those areas by "feel".

Tooth brushing: What you brush your teeth with is not as important as how you brush your teeth. Learn how to brush all the surfaces of the mouth, including your tongue. The tongue harbors the most bacteria associated with bad breath, and is a reservoir for re-infection of the teeth and sinuses. Baby boomers who never used tooth paste have fewer problems with their teeth than those who did use tooth paste because the original tooth pastes had sugar in them. Plain Baking Soda on a tooth brush sanitized by dipping the tooth brush in a small amount of Peroxide is the cheapest "tooth paste" and is equally effective as any brand of tooth paste in removing stain from teeth. The peroxide may also prevent re-infection of the tooth brush, lessening the length of infections from colds and flu. Be sure to sanitize all tooth brushes regularly.

That still leaves the areas between the teeth that are most susceptible to gum disease, and most adults have some gum disease. Floss is great when a person is young, but gum tissue and bone does recede naturally with age, making floss less effective. The more root surface exposed, the less effective is floss. Using an appropriately sized interproximal brush between the teeth will virtually eliminate gum disease and root decay in places floss cannot reach. You have three choices for care between your teeth. Floss, interproximal brushes, or eventually lose your teeth if you live long enough.

Interproximal brushes are the best.

Picture:

This patient improperly brushed the teeth every day, and there is serious gumline decay on the cuspid. The teeth on either side were in the brushed area and did not decay. Nobody had taught the patient to “brush the gums.”



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