

## Down to the Basics: How to Brush

Are you a scrubber, scouring your teeth with a brush that's so hard you would be better off with a steel wool pad? Maybe you are a quick in-and-out-got-better-things-to-do brusher? Do you floss three times a day until your gums are sore, or do you think flossing is just a way to get the leftover turkey out from that spot where it always seems to get stuck? Most people fall in between these two extremes (thank goodness), but it is amazing the differences in people's concepts of good oral hygiene. Everyone knows to brush and floss, but most have never been told HOW or WHY. In this article I'll cover brushing and address the exciting(!) topic of floss next time.

First, you need to brush AT LEAST twice a day. Why? At the end of a day, a lot of food has accumulated on and between your teeth. This food just sits there and decomposes, creating a feast for bacteria. These bacteria eat the food and create acid, which dissolves the tooth enamel and makes a hole, or cavity. It also makes your breath smell and causes gum inflammation or disease, which, among other things, can make you lose the bone holding you teeth in place and even contributes to heart attacks and strokes. So you HAVE to brush at night to remove the food from the daytime meals. And why brush in the morning? Overnight your mouth dries out. Your saliva inhibits the growth of the bacteria, so when it is reduced you get more bacteria, leading to morning breath and more of the aforementioned issues. You need to brush to get all this bacteria out of there. If you didn't get the food off from the day before, that REALLLY makes it a problem! Brushing during the day after snacks, especially sugary snacks, is also a great idea.

We constantly get asked, "What is the best toothpaste?" I can tell you, without a doubt in my mind, that the answer IS: it doesn't really matter that much. It is the least important part of brushing. Get yourself a toothpaste with fluoride to help harden up your teeth and prevent cavities. Get one you like the taste of. Don't seek out a whitening paste unless you get a whole lot of stain (smokers, heavy tea drinkers, etc.), as they don't really whiten teeth, they are just more abrasive. That hurts more than it helps with most people. You don't need to get too fancy with the paste, regardless of what the commercials say!

The brush you use DOES matter! If you use a manual brush choose a toothbrush with soft, rounded-end bristles and a head that is small enough to reach all parts of your teeth and mouth. A harder brush can actually damage your teeth and a bigger head means you miss areas that are harder to get to! Replace your toothbrush every 3 to 4 months, as they wear out quickly. If your toothbrush bristles no longer all point in the same direction, change your brush. Better yet, get an electric toothbrush. They DO work better at cleaning your teeth, and nicer models even guide you as to how long and how hard to brush. Even the cheap battery powered brushes are better than manual (if used correctly), but the nice oscillating/rotating brushes are best.

For a manual toothbrush, put a pea sized dab of paste on the brush. You don't need a huge ribbon the length of the brush like on the commercial; that's just a way of getting you to use the tube up quicker and buy more. Place the brush at a 45-degree angle where the teeth meet the gums. Press firmly, and make little circles with the brush, slowly moving it along. DO NOT SAW! Sawing back and forth can make the gums pull away from the teeth and can actually notch the tooth roots causing sensitivity! Brush all teeth inside and out. The inside gumline is harder to get to, and thus is often missed. Brushing you tongue removes bacteria and dead skin cells that cause bad breath, so that is also a great idea. For electric brushes, angle the brush and cover the surfaces as above, but the brush makes the circles for you. Just move slowly along the tooth surface and it will get the job done.

I hope this clears up some misconceptions on oral health and, for goodness sake, throw the steel wool away!