



### **Choosing the Best Toothpaste**

Thanks to better care and technological advances, more people than ever before are keeping their teeth throughout their lives. The most important thing you can do to make sure you're one of those who keep their natural teeth is to brush and floss regularly.

Most dental decay is caused by plaque, a sticky, colorless bacteria that is constantly forming on your teeth. Saliva, food (especially sugar) and fluids combine to produce plaque, which collects on teeth and where teeth and gums meet. Plaque that is not removed by regular brushing and flossing can harden into tartar, a crusty deposit that can only be removed by a dentist. Plaque also leads to gum disease, a potentially serious infection that can erode bone and destroy the tissues surrounding teeth. Flossing removes plaque between teeth, and brushing removes plaque from the large surfaces of the teeth and, if done correctly, from just under the gums.

With brushing being such an important factor in your oral health, you can see why your choice of a toothpaste is important, but with so many brands and types - plaque control, tartar control, whitening, gum care, sensitive teeth, polish, smoker's - from which to choose, picking the right toothpaste can be a daunting task. Your dentist or dental hygienist can help narrow the field by discussing what your special brushing needs are.

If you tend to build up plaque or tartar quickly, you'll want a plaque or tartar-control toothpaste. Anti-plaque/tartar toothpastes will have ingredients such as fluoride and/or antibacterial agents to limit plaque and tartar formation. (Check with your dentist before choosing fluoride toothpaste for your young children. Excessive fluoride ingestion by pre-school age children can lead to discoloration of the permanent teeth. If your child uses fluoride toothpaste, make sure s/he does not swallow toothpaste while brushing.)

If you smoke or drink tea or coffee, a whitening toothpaste may help with stains. However, whitening toothpastes only remove adherent stain. The ingredients necessary to actually bleach your teeth are not chemically stable enough to be included in toothpaste. Use caution with those toothpastes made to remove heavy stains, frequently referred to as "smoker's toothpaste" or "tooth polish". These toothpastes may be excessively abrasive and may cause progressive wearing away of the tooth and supporting tissues. (Also, if you smoke, be sure to see your dentist regularly, as smokers are at increased risk of gum disease, early tooth loss and also soft tissue conditions including oral cancer.)

Temperature sensitive teeth will benefit from a toothpaste made to desensitize your teeth. Your needs may change as you age, so don't be surprised if your hygienist recommends a type of toothpaste you haven't used before.

Once you've determined which type of toothpaste is best, choose the one that tastes and feels best and doesn't cause irritation or sensitivity problems. If you like the flavor and texture of your toothpaste, you'll brush more and longer. And brushing well and regularly means you'll be smiling with your natural teeth well into your mature years.

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### **How Safe Are Dental X-Rays?**

When X-rays are passed through your mouth, more X-rays are absorbed by the denser parts of your mouth, such as teeth and bone, than by soft tissues. The X-rays strike the film that is behind your tooth, and this creates an image on the film. Tooth decay, infections, gum disease and other signs of dental change in your mouth appear darker because of more X-ray penetration.

Dentists consider X-rays one of the most useful tools in helping patients maintain good oral health. X-rays help dentists diagnose relatively common disorders such as cavities, periodontal disease and infections, and some of the more uncommon problems, such as cysts, abscesses and tumors.

X-rays can also allow your dentist to determine whether a child's permanent teeth are erupting properly and with correct spacing. In general, children need X-rays more often than adults because their mouths grow and change rapidly, and they are more susceptible to tooth decay than adults.

In today's digital age, dentistry is making great advances in lowering the radiation dose administered during a dental X-ray. In the 1930s and 1940s, the cone used for x-rays covered most of the head and neck. Today, the cone is very small, so radiation is only pointed at the small spot where the X-ray film is located.

Many of the critical organs that might show radiation effects are not in the path of radiation, and the use of lead-lined, full-body aprons protects your body from stray radiation. While your dentist takes this precaution to protect you, stray radiation is almost nonexistent with the modern dental X-ray machines. (By law all X-ray machines in the

U.S. are checked for accuracy and safety at least every two years, in some states, more often.) Also, advancements in X-ray film mean that the film requires less radiation to develop the same quality picture.

An even newer advance is digital X-rays using sensors that feed the images to a computer. The digital X-ray system is more sensitive than dental X-ray film systems, so exposure to X-rays is cut by as much as 90 percent.

You are exposed to many sources of radiation every day, from the sun, minerals in the soil, your home appliances. Radiation can damage the body's tissues and cells and can lead to the development of cancer, but fortunately, the radiation to which you are exposed during the taking of dental X-rays is extremely small.

Without the ability to see inside a tooth and beneath the gums, more disease would go unchecked and more teeth would be lost because proper treatment wasn't started in time. If dental problems are found and treated early, dental care is more comfortable and affordable. Dental x-rays are not without risk, but the risk is minuscule compared with the huge diagnostic benefit of keeping your natural teeth healthy and disease free.

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### **Get started toward a beautiful smile today!**

We're excited to tell you that our office now offers Invisalign Teen—the clear alternative to braces—now for teens! This revolutionary new product can straighten your child's teeth without the hassle, discomfort, and embarrassment of traditional braces.

Invisalign Teen's clear aligners are virtually invisible. Even better, they're removable. This means teens can eat whatever foods they want, and brush and floss with ease! And, maybe best of all, they don't involve any metal or wires, which can cause irritation. Invisalign Teen aligners are made from a lightweight plastic material, and they fit precisely on the teeth—almost like a glove.

Most teens have a non-stop lifestyle, and sometimes, they lose things. Including aligners! But with Invisalign Teen, that's no problem. If you lose your aligner, just let the doctor know ASAP, and he or she can have a replacement sent to you quickly.

Invisalign Teen is clear, comfortable, and virtually invisible.

For more information on Invisalign Teen, contact our office today!

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### **Plaque and Tartar Control**

One of the main causes of tooth decay, **plaque** is a sticky film of bacteria that adheres to teeth, gum tissues, dental appliances, and even your tongue. Plaque forms from the bacteria that naturally live in your mouth, and it uses carbohydrates in the food you eat to produce acid, which can attack your dental enamel and eat a hole in your tooth. This hole is called a cavity.

Plaque is so sticky that it can't be rinsed off. It must be brushed off, and it forms again soon after you remove it. Some studies report that plaque begins reforming as quickly as five minutes after you brush! Other studies report that it can take up to four hours to begin reforming. Regardless of how long it takes, plaque does start to reform, and that that's why your dentist wants you to brush at least twice a day, but preferably after every meal.

In spite of the best oral hygiene, plaque can become calculus, commonly called tartar. Tartar is a hard substance that forms from a combination of minerals in the saliva and dead plaque bacterial cells. This deposit grows and mineralizes, sort of like a coral reef, in the nooks and crannies between teeth and just under your gums. Tartar can irritate your gums, causing them to pull away and leave a pocket where bacteria can congregate and eventually cause gum disease.

The good news is that you can control plaque. Frequent brushing and flossing removes the plaque that can cause so many problems if left untreated. Tartar, however, can only be removed by a professional dental cleaning with special instruments. But, in a way, you can control tartar build-up...by brushing with tartar control toothpaste. The tartar control ingredients in toothpaste cannot remove tartar that's already formed, but they can help prevent it. The more plaque you remove from your teeth, the fewer building blocks tartar will have to grow. There's even research that suggests that chewing a sugarless gum with xylitol may help prevent the build-up of bacteria that leads to plaque and tartar.

Another way to slow plaque is to eat a healthy, balanced diet and limit between-meal snacks. Sugary foods like candy and starchy foods like bread cause acids to form in greater amounts than healthy foods like carrots and nuts. If you snack often and don't brush after, you're subjecting your teeth to acid plaque attacks all day long.

You should also see your dentist and hygienist twice a year for checkups and cleanings. Your dentist can look for problem spots that you may be missing in your oral hygiene, and your hygienist will remove any tartar build-up before it has a chance to cause a problem.

With a lifetime habit of brushing, flossing, fluoride supplements and dental visits, tooth decay and gum disease will become almost non-existent. That means you'll be smiling with your natural teeth for the rest of your life!

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### **Tongue Piercing**

Certain types of body piercing have existed continuously since ancient times. Today, in most cultures, body piercing has become more acceptable in the general population than ever before in history. Tongue piercing is especially popular with teens and young adults. Tongues are typically pierced by running a needle through the front third of the tongue, from top to bottom. Mouth jewelry, in the form of a removable stud, hoop or barbell-shaped device is inserted through the hole.

No systematic research has been done on the after effects of tongue art, so it's impossible to say how likely it is that there will be complications from a tongue piercing, however, the American Dental Association officially does not support piercing in or around the mouth because of the potential for serious side effects.

Negative effects from the piercing process or from wearing the jewelry can include pain, post-placement swelling, prolonged bleeding, gum injury, permanent numbness, loss of taste and oral hygiene problems. More serious side effects include speech impediments, injury or shrinkage of gums, damage to teeth, fillings, and other dental work, difficulty chewing or swallowing, cysts and prolonged blood loss immediately after the procedure. Infection is always a possibility - after all, you're creating an open wound in your mouth! - and includes the risk of contracting hepatitis, HIV and AIDS.

Tongue piercing also can result in an allergic reaction if the metals used in the jewelry are not of the highest quality. And even if the highest quality metal is used, all metal jewelry can injure the one thing that cannot easily be replaced, the beautiful enamel of your teeth. In a study done by a prominent university, of young adults who had worn a barbell through their tongue for at least 4 years, 47% had chipped teeth. Some studies show that the repeated bumping of the jewelry against teeth and gums causes gums to recede, setting the stage for periodontal (gum) disease.

However, if despite the warnings, you're still planning on having your tongue pierced, make sure it is done as hygienically as possible. Make sure your piercer is experienced and licensed and works in a sterile environment with sterile, disposable instruments. Ask your dentist for advice on oral hygiene while the piercing is healing, including advice on brushing to avoid inflaming the tongue, and use of mouthwash to clean areas that your toothbrush cannot reach.

If you have a heart defect or a health condition that requires that you take preventive antibiotics before dental work, DO NOT under any circumstances, have a piercing done without seeing your doctor or dentist first. The needle inserted through your tongue during the piercing process opens your bloodstream to bacteria, which can lead to a life-threatening infection in your heart.

Also, be sure to get regular dental check-ups. Whether you have a tongue piercing or not, a thorough examination of your gums and teeth are needed to identify problem areas or potential long term dental health concerns.