

happy teeth

Brush up on the right way to take care of your pearly whites and sidestep a few common mistakes.

WHAT ABOUT MOUTHWASH?

It's less crucial than brushing or flossing, but a good addition to your regime, especially if you're cavity-prone, says Gulia Omene, D.M.D., a member of the American Dental Association. Mouthwashes with alcohol reduce bacteria and freshen breath; those with fluoride strengthen enamel. Your dentist can advise you on the right one.



HOW DO I CHOOSE A TOOTHPASTE?

Beyond looking for the American Dental Association seal of approval, which confirms that the toothpaste does what the label claims, it's personal preference. "Fluoride helps strengthen enamel," Omene says. "But it's the brushing motion that does most of the work cleaning your teeth."

WILL SELTZER HURT MY TEETH?

While seltzer and carbonated waters have more acid than plain H₂O, they're much less acidic than juice or soda. A can a day is fine. "But I wouldn't chug it all day long," Omene says.

BRUSHING NO-NO'S

DON'T BRUSH RIGHT AFTER EATING

Acids in most foods can temporarily weaken enamel, so brushing too soon after eating can wear it down. "Wait 30 to 60 minutes," says Gulia Omene, D.M.D., "to give the proteins and enzymes in your saliva a chance to wash over your teeth and strengthen the enamel again."

DON'T SCRUB

"You think the harder you brush, the cleaner your teeth will be, but that's not true," says Carla P. Orland, a D.D.S. with the Chicago Dental Society. "Brushing too zealously can damage your teeth and gums." If your bristles start to splay out within a few weeks, lighten up.

DON'T OPEN EXTRA WIDE TO REACH YOUR MOLARS

If you do, the back of your jawbone can get in the way of reaching the back teeth. Open just wide enough for the toothbrush to fit in.

DON'T WHITEN TOO OFTEN

This can cause gum and tooth sensitivity. Use whitening toothpaste a few times a week, at-home strips every six months, or professional whitening once a year. ■

DO I REALLY NEED TO FLOSS? YES! Even though the government cut flossing from its guidelines, the ADA strongly stands behind it. "If you were on a desert island, I'd rather you have floss than a toothbrush," Omene says. Floss once a day *before* you brush.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE



SOFT-BRISTLE BRUSH

Get the softest bristles you can find. They clean just as well as hard bristles, but without the risk of harming your gum tissue.



GUM SOFT-PICKS

Call it über-flossing: The soft bristles dislodge food bits and easily get around crowns and dental work while massaging gums. Use along with floss.



GUMCHUCKS FLOSSER

The two-handle grip and the disposable tips connected by a piece of floss gives you better navigation (and no fingers in your mouth).