

Which Toothbrush should I use?

One only has to walk down the aisle of the dental products section of the drugstore to realize that this is a question which has come to everyone's mind at one point. There are a myriad of choices when it comes to picking a tooth brush.

The early history and evolution of the toothbrush has its origin in the "chewing sticks" used by the Babylonians as early as 3000 BC. Chew sticks had one end chewed into which became soften and bristle like while the opposite end was pointed and used as a pick to clean food and debris from between the teeth. This has been verified by various excavations done all over the world, in which toothpicks, chew sticks, tree twigs, and animal bones have been recovered. The first toothbrush is believed to have been invented by the Chinese. These first toothbrushes had a bamboo handle which was attached a set of bristles crafted from the tough hair of the Siberian wild boar. In 1938, DuPont manufactured the first nylon bristle toothbrush which has become the standard for today's toothbrushes.

The purpose of using a toothbrush is to remove dental plaque to prevent dental caries and periodontal or gum disease. Caries is caused by acids produced by bacteria in dental plaque. Plaque is a soft, sticky, thin film of bacteria, and food debris that develops on the tooth surface about 24 hours after the tooth is cleaned. Mutans streptococci are a group of bacteria that grow in plaque and can cause caries. If this plaque is not removed then eventually the soft plaque mineralizes becoming calculus (hard plaque or tartar), which cannot easily be removed with a toothbrush. This calculus harbors a different set of bacteria which can cause periodontal or gum disease.

Some people think that selecting a toothbrush with hard bristles would be better for removing plaque than a toothbrush with soft bristles. However; a hard or medium bristle toothbrush will damage your teeth and gums. A toothbrush must always be soft bristled and it is important to use gentle circular motions when you brush.

There are also many different sizes available. Look for a soft toothbrush with a small head. It is important to be able to reach all areas inside your mouth, including the back teeth that can be hard to reach.

There are also electric toothbrushes available and while either an electric or manual brush are good to use as long as you brush your teeth on a regular basis and use a good technique studies have shown that an electric toothbrush is more effective at removing plaque than a manual one. Overall studies have demonstrates that long-term use of these electric toothbrushes improves periodontal health in adult periodontitis patients, and help reduce gingival inflammation. These brushes allow one to concentrate on getting to the hard to reach areas without having to worry about a scrubbing motion as well. Because they are constantly moving or scrubbing they are more effective at removing plaque with less effort. Look for an electric toothbrush with a soft bristle and small head just like you would for a regular manual toothbrush.

Regardless of which brush you choose, remember that the brush or brush head will need to be replaced regularly. Replace your toothbrush or head every couple of months or when it starts to shows signs of wear and tear. If you have a cold or illness, it's also advisable to get a new toothbrush after you get well.

Dental caries and periodontal disease is a preventable disease for most people with regular brushing, at least twice a day, and flossing, at least once a day. Be sure to use a soft toothbrush and gentle circular motions and replace it regularly. Finally, regular checkups and cleanings every 6 months with your dentist can help to keep your teeth healthy.

Written by Carlos Vallecillo, DDS and Rossana Menna, DDS
www.monalisadental.com