



## CLEANING YOUR TEETH FOR LIFE BRUSHING

THE INFORMATION CONTAINED IN THIS PAMPHLET IS GENERAL IN NATURE AND IS INTENDED ONLY AS A GENERAL GUIDE. PLEASE ASK ANY SPECIFIC QUESTIONS YOU MAY HAVE ABOUT YOUR PARTICULAR CASE.

### ORAL HYGIENE

#### What is it?

- Oral hygiene refers to all the procedures you can do at home to treat and maintain your teeth, your gums and any prosthetic constructions (eg. crowns, dentures, implants, etc).
- Most oral hygiene tasks involve mechanically cleaning your teeth and gums to remove bacterial plaque which causes decay and periodontal diseases. The mouth naturally contains bacteria which continue to multiply if not regularly disturbed to prevent them causing disease.
- Plaque forms on fillings/crowns, dentures, gums and teeth. In terms of periodontal disease, the plaque that grows at the margin where the tooth and gum meet (the tooth-gum line) is the most significant.
- All periodontal diseases are caused by plaque, in particular plaque that forms under the gum line, between the gum and the tooth (in the pocket or crevice). Plaque begins to form above the gum line where it can easily be removed, but if left will soon slip under the gum line.
- To prevent periodontal diseases, it is vital to regularly remove plaque from above the tooth-gum line (and just underneath it). After treatment of periodontal diseases, most of the plaque is removed from below the gum line, but it can easily reform unless regular plaque removal, above the gum line continues.

#### Plaque

- Plaque is the soft sticky, yellow/white material that forms on the teeth and gums and fillings in the mouth. It consists of bacteria (germs) and the sticky polymers they make to hold onto the teeth and each other. Plaque is not food, and cannot be washed away, it has to be physically removed.
- Plaque forms in everyone's mouths. It is normal to have bacteria in the mouth, many of these bacteria are useful in preventing other more damaging bacteria from being able to infect the mouth.

#### Toothbrushes

- Always use a brush with a small head. (A child's tooth brush is often suitable for adults.) The bristles should be soft and even these should be further softened under warm water before brushing when they are new. Different manufactures define soft differently, so a soft brush in one brand may be much harder than another brand.
- Patients often say that soft brushes do not feel as if they are doing as good a job as a hard brush, but in fact, soft brushes are just as good and are less likely to do damage to your teeth and gums.
- The shape of the brush is not particularly important in most cases; it is far more important to use the brush in the correct manner. A small head is usually best. The shape, colour and position of the bristles is not particularly important and nor is the handle. No brush cleans between your teeth properly.
- Often, patients with periodontal disease will require special brushes to clean around and between teeth. You will be shown how to use these brushes if you need them.

#### Toothpastes

- There are many tooth pastes available on the market. The most important thing to remember is that the type of tooth paste is secondary to effective brushing in the treatment of periodontal disease. You only require a small amount of any toothpaste (a blob as big as a pea is more than enough.)





- As a general rule, toothpastes containing fluoride will be beneficial, not so much for treating periodontal disease but to protect any exposed root surfaces from decay.
- Sensitive tooth toothpastes, may be useful in the treatment of sensitive teeth (which can occur following recession of the gums after treatment). These tooth pastes are designed to be used all the time (not just while your teeth are sensitive) and patients find that not every brand works for them.
- Some toothpastes are designed to help treat gum problems. The only type that provide any real benefit are those pastes containing triclosan, an antibacterial, anti-inflammatory chemical (eg. Colgate Total). Again it should be remembered the contents of the toothpaste are not nearly as important as effective brushing.

## Toothbrushing

- There are many different ways of brushing your teeth. It is important that your technique does not cause damage to the teeth or gums.
- People suffering periodontal disease should usually brush their teeth at least twice a day. After breakfast, and most importantly before going to bed at night. Try to get into the habit of brushing your teeth in the same order, that way you shouldn't miss any sites. Brushing in front of a mirror is often useful. Teeth should be brushed on the inside, outside and the biting surfaces.
- The bristles of the brush should be positioned at 45° to the tooth surface and should be angled towards the tooth-gum line. (This will allow some bristles to just reach under the gum.)
- The brush should then be moved in a small (about 2 tooth widths) circular motion.



- Firm pressure is required, to ensure the proper removal of plaque, but it is also important not to over brush.
- In some areas of the mouth (eg. the tongue/inside of lower teeth) it may be very difficult to move the brush in a small circle. In this case a small mini scrubbing horizontal action can be used, extending no further than about 2 tooth widths.
- This technique is very good at removing plaque but is not simple to do. No-one is born knowing how to clean their teeth, it is a skill that has to be learnt and practised. Many people only partially achieve good cleaning, for patients with periodontal disease, good cleaning will not be adequate, perfect cleaning is required!
- You will find that effective brushing does take more time than less effective methods, but these extra few minutes each day can be invaluable in maintaining a healthy dentition.

### Note

- **There is a constant stream of new oral hygiene products flooding the market all the time. Much of the advertising accompanying these products can be confusing and is usually designed to sell the product, more than educate patients.**
- **If you have any questions, feel free to ask. We have no affiliation to any particular company.**

