

Buying oral care products

Maintaining a healthy smile begins at home. Besides regular dental checkups, spending a few minutes caring for your teeth and gums each day can help keep your smile healthy.

Among today's plaque-busting artillery is an assortment of toothbrushes (powered and manual), as well as toothpaste, floss, interdental cleaners, oral irrigators and more. When buying oral care products, how do you know which ones are right for you? Even savvy shoppers sometimes are baffled by the seemingly endless variety of dental care products.

First, ask your dentist or dental hygienist for a recommendation. They may suggest a particular type of product or brand or give you an opinion about the products you currently use.

Next, look for products that display the American



Dental Association's Seal of Acceptance. For more than 125 years, the ADA has sought to ensure the safety and effectiveness of dental products. The Seal is an assurance that the product has met ADA criteria for safety and effectiveness. The

labels and advertising for products awarded the Seal also must present true and accurate information.

TOOTHBRUSHES

When selecting a toothbrush, look for one that is comfortable to hold and fits your mouth. The ADA says that manual toothbrushes can be just as effective as powered toothbrushes. People whose motor skills are impaired, such as people with arthritis, may find powered toothbrushes helpful. Toothbrushes should be replaced every three to four months, or sooner if the bristles become frayed. Toothbrushes with frayed bristles will not clean teeth effectively.

TOOTHPASTES

All toothpastes awarded the ADA Seal of Acceptance contain fluoride to help prevent tooth decay. Today you can buy toothpaste in a pump or a tube, in paste or gel form, for children or adults. You can buy toothpaste with special ingredients for controlling tartar or sensitivity or for whitening teeth.

DENTAL FLOSS

A toothbrush can't reach all of the spots in which plaque collects. Dental floss is needed to remove the plaque and debris that collect between the teeth and under the gumline. Waxed and unwaxed dental floss both are effective. Waxed floss may be easier to use if your teeth are tightly spaced. If you find it difficult to manipulate long strands of floss, consider using a special floss holder.

INTERDENTAL CLEANING AIDS

Another way to remove plaque is with an interdental cleaning aid. These products include special picks or sticks. People who have trouble handling dental floss may find it easier to use interdental cleaners. Discuss the proper use of these cleaning aids with your dentist and follow instructions to avoid injuring your gums.

ORAL IRRIGATORS

These devices direct a stream of water to remove particles of food from around and between the teeth. They may be helpful to people with braces or fixed partial dentures. They are useful for cleaning hard-to-reach areas and may help reduce gingivitis. However, using an oral irrigator is not a substitute for brushing and flossing.

MOUTHRINES

Mouthwashes generally are used for cosmetic reasons; they temporarily freshen breath or "sweeten" the mouth. Although they can aid in removing food particles, their primary purpose is to mask mouth odor. Nonprescription fluoride mouthrinses, which have received the ADA Seal of Acceptance, can be effective tools in preventing tooth decay. Your dentist may recommend using an antiplaque or antigingivitis mouthrinse to control plaque or prevent gum disease.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on products with the American Dental Association's Seal of Acceptance, visit "www.ada.org". ■

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