



**There are people  
who laugh to  
show their fine  
teeth.**

Joseph Roux,  
Meditations of  
a Parish Priest

**BEST NEW BRUSH**

The new Reach Max toothbrush (\$3.50) is encircled with rubber bristles, which massage gums, and has a comfortable handle,

## How to Clean Your Teeth

When it comes to oral hygiene, most Americans are under-achievers. Here's how to floss and brush the right way

YOU DO IT EVERY DAY, but you may not be doing it right. Brushing your teeth is a simple ritual, yet plenty of people get it wrong: They don't brush long enough, they don't brush properly, or they don't floss at all. Lax brushing habits are the main reason, according to the U.S. Surgeon General, that 80 percent of Americans have some form of gum disease (and most don't even know it). Gum disease can cause more than oral havoc. Recent studies indicate associations between chronic gum disease and a host of health issues, including diabetes, premature or low-birth-weight babies, heart disease, and stroke.

Concerned? Here's a simple plan for getting your teeth and gums in better shape. All it takes are the proper tools—floss, paste, the correct brush—and a little commitment.

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY WENDELL WEBBER

To make sure you're brushing long enough, brush for the length of one song on the radio.

## GOOD FOR TEETH

- Foods that produce a high salivary flow can remove the bacteria that cause staining, yellowing, gum disease, and tooth decay, says New York City cosmetic dentist Lana Rozenberg. These include apples, pears, kiwis, celery, carrots, broccoli, cauliflower, and cucumbers.
- Raw fruits and vegetables physically rub against teeth and dislodge plaque, and they also require lots of chewing, which creates more saliva and flushes bacteria away.
- Eating hard cheese, such as Swiss or aged Cheddar, after a sugary snack or meal may help neutralize the plaque acids that cause tooth decay.

## BAD FOR TEETH

- Sucking on citrus fruits. Over time the acid can cause enamel erosion.
- Dark foods (such as berries, red wine, grape or cranberry juice, and dark colas) can cause staining. Either switch to lighter versions (white grape juice, light sodas), or make sure to rinse your mouth with water, chew sugarless gum, or brush your teeth after consuming them. Another option: Sip dark drinks through a straw, so they don't make contact with your teeth.

The value of an electric toothbrush is debatable. The advantage is that the action mimics the correct brushing form and tends to clean better than you could with a regular brush. Before investing in an electric toothbrush (\$30 to \$100), try one of the less expensive battery-operated options, like the Crest SpinBrush Pro (No. 2, at right; \$8 at drugstores). But if you prefer the simplicity and economy of a conventional brush, just follow these directions.

## BRUSHING TIPS

- Place your toothbrush at a 45-degree angle to your gums.
- Use gentle pressure. Scrubbing too hard can irritate gums.
- Don't forget to brush behind the back teeth. If you have trouble, an angled toothbrush (or a child's toothbrush) might help.
- End by brushing your tongue to get rid of lingering bacteria that can cause bad breath and gum disease.

## RINSE

The average person doesn't need to gargle. However, if you have gingivitis, use a rinse, like Listerine Antiseptic (\$4 for 17.5 ounces at drugstores). It helps kill bacteria and can guard against plaque buildup. If you're cavity-prone, use a fluoride rinse after flossing and brushing.



## Beyond the Basic Brush

Every year toothbrush innovations come along. New York dentist Lana Rozenberg tested some of the latest upgrades. Here are her comments.

1. **Mentadent White & Clean** (\$3). The rubber strip won't whiten your teeth, as promised, but it will help remove stains.
2. **Crest Spinbrush Pro** (\$8). The spinning heads get under your gums, a hiding spot for bacteria. Runs on batteries.
3. **Braun Oral-B 3D Excel** (\$70). The best feature of this electric brush: a sensor that shuts it off if you're using too much pressure. A timer beeps when you've brushed for two minutes.
4. **Crest Massage Plus** (\$2.50). The rubber tips are good for your gums, but the brush is too large to clean tight corners.