



## Tips for a Clean Mouth and Appliances by Hygienist Michelle A.

### How to Brush Your Teeth

It is important to brush your teeth approximately every 12 hours to remove bacteria from the mouth. Some people require brushing more often because of special conditions in the mouth - such as wearing a partial denture, having a rapid accumulation of bacterial plaque or tartar, dry mouth, compromised immune system, etc. However very few people can get by brushing less than every 12 hours without seeing inflammation as a result. AND, it is not enough to simply brush twice a day. Brushing with **proper technique** ensures that your gum tissue and teeth are cleaned but also that there is no damage due to improper brushing.

- Place a small amount of toothpaste on the toothbrush head and spread over all the tooth surfaces before beginning to brush.
- Place the toothbrush on the molars on the inside of the upper or lower jaw at a **45-degree** angle towards the gums. (Picture 1 below) “Massage” the teeth and gums with a gentle, small, circular/vibratory stroke. Do not use the traditional hard, vigorous, back and forth brushing motion.
- Allow the toothbrush to **stay in one area of the mouth for 4-5 seconds** while performing the massaging strokes. Then move forward to the next teeth in line and hold for 4-5 seconds. Make sure to go around the entire inner part of the arch, taking about 30 seconds.
- When cleaning the tongue side of the front teeth on the upper and lower arch, it is better to use a “heel-toe” technique where the tooth brush is pulled up and down while keeping contact with the gum tissues. This helps to ensure each tooth gets brushed. The “heel-toe” technique is especially helpful in preventing tartar buildup on the lower front teeth. (Picture 3 below)
- Take 30 seconds for the inner tongue side and 30 seconds for the outer cheek side of both the upper and lower arches for a **total of 2 minutes**.
- Next, brush the biting surfaces of the upper and lower arch using a gentle, short, back and forth stroke.
- Lastly, remember to brush your tongue. Place the toothbrush towards the back of the tongue and do 1-2 pull strokes forward. Then rinse the brush. Repeat this until you no longer see plaque on the brush.
- For “extra credit”, it is a good idea to gently brush the roof of the mouth and inner cheeks since bacteria can also be found on these surfaces. Additional brushing is especially important for people who wear partial or full upper dentures because bacteria is pressed up against the palate all day, while the denture is worn. The extra massaging will not only remove the bacteria, but it also will stimulate blood flow to the palate helping to maintain healthy bone levels.



## *Frequently Asked Questions*

### **Why do I need to brush two times a day?**

It is recommended to remove as much bacterial plaque as possible from the mouth, every 12 hours. Bacteria naturally occur in the mouth, and our bodies can handle a certain amount without showing signs of inflammation. If bacteria are allowed to remain in the mouth undisturbed, they reproduce and create thicker, stickier plaque colonies. After becoming established on the mouth surfaces, these colonies excrete acids, which are the cause of tooth decay. Additionally the acids damage the gum tissue and the surrounding bone structures, causing gum disease. If plaque is removed about every 12 hours, all it can do is try to rebuild the plaque colonies. There is less time to reproduce and cause damage to the tooth, gum and bone structures.

### **Why do I need to brush for 2 minutes?**

Brushing for 2 minutes may seem to be a long time however it is necessary in order to remove bacteria on all surfaces of the teeth and tongue. It takes about 4 seconds of brushing in a small, circular pattern in one area to dislodge the sticky plaque colony from the tooth. If you are staying in each area for a full 4 seconds before moving on, you will easily brush for the recommended timeframe. Remember, in addition to the tooth biting surfaces and tongue, you also need to brush the outer tooth surface against the cheek and the inner tooth surface on the tongue side.

### **What is the difference between plaque and tartar?**

Plaque is a thick, sticky material inhabited by many different types of bacteria. It clings to the tooth. As bacteria mature they create more plaque, reproduce, eat sugars and excrete acids onto the tooth. When plaque is allowed to sit on a tooth undisturbed, components naturally occurring in the saliva harden the plaque into tartar. This rough surface then allows for more plaque and bacteria to accumulate. Plaque can be removed with a toothbrush, floss, and other supplemental cleaning tools.

Unlike plaque, tartar is hard and firmly attached to the tooth and requires removal with special dental tools by a hygienist. Because the chemical make-up of saliva is different in each person, some people develop the hard tartar at a much faster pace than others. There are tartar control toothpastes available to help slow down the calcification, however proper brushing and flossing techniques are the best defense to stop the accumulation.

### **Why do I need to brush my dental implants?**

Dental implants, bridgework, and removable dental appliances can all accumulate plaque - just as natural teeth can. Even though these appliances cannot get cavities, the acids excreted by bacterial plaque can irritate the gum and bone structures around them. It is important to remove the bacterial plaque regularly in order to reduce inflammation, bone-loss, and mouth odors.

### **Should I use an electric toothbrush?**

Electric toothbrushes can be an extremely helpful tool in protecting the teeth and gums. They not only help a patient who has difficulty brushing with the recommended technique and length of time, they can also help to provide extra gum stimulation to areas with inflammation. Scientific studies have shown that patients who use an electric toothbrush tend to have less plaque and bacteria in their mouth versus patients who use a manual (regular) toothbrush.