If you’re like most people, you probably don’t give much thought to how you brush your teeth, beyond squeezing on some toothpaste and scrubbing back and forth. But as your dentist will tell you, how you brush your teeth matters a great deal.

How often you brush, how long you brush, the kind of technique and the toothbrush you use all impact on the effectiveness of your brushing. For instance, did you know you should brush for a minimum of two minutes, twice a day? Most people don’t come close to brushing for that long, often brushing their teeth quickly and distractedly.

**General tips**

Tempting as it is to think that pressing harder on your teeth equals a better clean, the fact is that too much pressure can damage your gums and tooth enamel. If the bristles are wearing out on your toothbrushes well before the three-month mark, you’re pressing too hard and you should ask your dentist to show you a less damaging technique.

Replacing your brush, whether manual or powered, should take place when the bristles start to spread apart, or every three months, whichever comes first.

The importance of the right toothpaste

While there are a lot of toothpastes on the market, you should choose one that contains fluoride. When added to toothpaste, fluoride strengthens teeth, making them more resistant to attacks from sugar and acid, thereby preventing decay. Fluoride can also help remineralise (heal or reverse) early decay. Depending on your risk of dental decay your dentist will recommend a type of toothpaste best suited to you.

Fluoride toothpaste for children

Unless it’s recommended by your dentist, the general consensus is that you shouldn’t use toothpaste when cleaning the teeth of children under 18 months of age. Instead, use a small soft toothbrush and simply use tap water to wet the brush. Use a pea-sized amount of low fluoride toothpaste (sometimes labelled junior or children’s) for children aged 18 months to six years. Adults should always supervise children brushing their teeth until the age of eight to ensure they don’t swallow the toothpaste.

Fluoride toothpaste and risk of tooth decay

If you’re a person at high risk of developing tooth decay, your dentist may recommend you use a higher strength fluoride toothpaste.

You may be deemed a person of ‘high decay risk’ if:

- you’re undergoing orthodontic treatment (braces)
- your diet is high in sugar or acid
- you have difficulty brushing your teeth due to arthritis or a disability
- you have ‘Dry Mouth’, or low amounts of saliva
- you’re living in an area without fluoridated water.
Brushing
Correct brushing technique

1. Squeeze a pea-sized blob of toothpaste onto a soft bristled brush.

2. Brush gently using circular motions. If you brush too hard it can harm your gums.

3. Brush all the surfaces of your teeth paying special attention to where the tooth meets the gum. This is where plaque builds up.

4. Remember to brush behind your front teeth using the tip of the toothbrush.

5. Keep brushing for at least two minutes and do this morning and night.

Did you know that it takes two to three minutes to brush your teeth properly but most people only spend 30 seconds or less?

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