

Comparative analysis of “brush your teeth” and “paint your mouth”

Opinion

My name is Dr Garth Pettit and has been an oral health care educator and author since January 1997 5 years after I retired from a lifetime in general dental practices. The instruction “Brush Your Teeth” is traceable back to 3,500 B.C. when a Babylonian, non-dentist, created the Chew Stick for cleaning tooth enamel surfaces. He selected little finger-thickness, fresh twigs from trees, plucked away the foliage then chewed one end to fray it. Even now, in the 21st Century A.D., Chew Sticks continue to be used by people in many countries to clean tooth enamel surfaces. A Chinese Emperor in 1498 patented the first tooth brush to be made with bristles. He again was a non-dentist. He used bone or bamboo handles and embedded them with bristles at right angles to the handles. The bristles he used were taken from the back of a Siberian hog’s neck. He named it a “Tooth Brush” and rightly claimed it was more efficient at cleaning tooth enamel surfaces than was the Chew Stick. Tooth Paste was invented by Dr Julian Botot, a French dentist, in 1755, for King Louis XV of France. He also invented the first mouth wash.

The instructions “brush your teeth”

There have been a multitude of variants of the instruction “Brush Your Teeth” since 3,500 B.C. but not one by change of name. In recent years most have some commonalities such as: brush your teeth and brush the gums that are adjacent to your teeth. Start with brushing your front teeth and gums top and bottom with bristles angled at 45 degrees to enamel surface and moving bristles in small circles. Repeat for outsides of back teeth and gums on each side. Repeat this procedure for the inside surfaces of teeth and gums. Sometimes brushing your tongue is recommended. Almost always is advice to continue this ‘brushing in circles’ for 2 minutes or longer then to spit out. That routine ignores cleaning other mouth surfaces that become dirty when eating and drinking, those are:

- a. The inside surfaces of cheeks.
- b. Inside surfaces of lips.
- c. The roof of the mouth.
- d. The floor of the mouth under the tongue.

That routine also does not include rinsing the mouth with water to rid the mouth of

- a. Cleaned off harmful plaque.
- b. Millions of cleaned off bacteria, of which there are 500 different types that dwell naturally in mouths.

The instruction Brush Your Teeth has changed from what it was in 3,500 B.C. to what is recommended today.¹⁻⁶

My 2001 S.W.O.T. analysis

My youngest granddaughter, 6 years after I retired from dentistry, was diagnosed with mild tooth decay in July 1996. I resolved to return

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to dentistry with this mission: Prevent Oral Diseases in Children. January 1997 I became the District Dental Officer, East Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, Australia and began my research. In January 2000 a Decayed, Missing, Filled Teeth Analysis at a remote East Arnhem Land school showed the 6-7 years old classroom children had, for the third consecutive year, no new tooth decay, dramatically different from all other classroom children. I then subjected the hygiene instruction Brush Your Teeth to a Strength Weakness Opportunity Threat Analysis. It revealed no strengths, numerous weaknesses and threats and an opportunity to create a new oral hygiene instruction. I then created an instruction that was totally oral by addressing all 7 inside mouth surfaces; teeth gums, tongue, roof, floor, cheeks and lips. All seven surfaces get dirty when you eat and drink! All seven surfaces harbour some of the millions of 500 different types of bacteria that dwell naturally in plaque! Although plaque on tooth enamel and immediately adjacent gums, named gingivae, harbours the most bacteria. I then named the new oral, oral hygiene instruction “Treat Your Mouth”. I renamed it “Treat Your Whole Mouth in 2006. But in 2007 when demonstrating the instruction to children in a remote school I unwittingly said “Would you like me to show you how to Paint Your Mouth?, I had the whole class standing, jumping and saying Yes! Yes! Yes! Since then I have always advised “Paint Your Mouth” not “Brush Your Teeth”, not “Treat Your Mouth” or not “Treat Your Whole Mouth”.

My oral hygiene instructions “paint your mouth”

I recommend 3 steps to “Paint Your Mouth”:⁷⁻⁹ Step 1, clean your whole mouth (teeth, gums, tongue, roof, floor, cheeks and lips). Step2, rinse mouth thoroughly with water and spit out. Step 3, Repeat Step 1, but no rinsing, just spitting out excess foam. Use a 7 years old child’s soft bristle tooth brush. Use your preferred fluoride tooth paste. Hold bristles at right angle to all seven surfaces and simply brushing up and down. Then thoroughly rinse with water to rid the mouth of all plaque and most of unwanted bacteria. That leaves the mouth fresh and clean but not protected. Finally repeat Step 1 but do not rinse. You’ll be amazed at how fresher your mouth feels and for how much longer it remains fresh.¹⁰⁻¹²

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Conflicts of interests

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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