



Toothbrush Hygiene

What you don't see may hurt you... Gross stuff hiding on your toothbrush

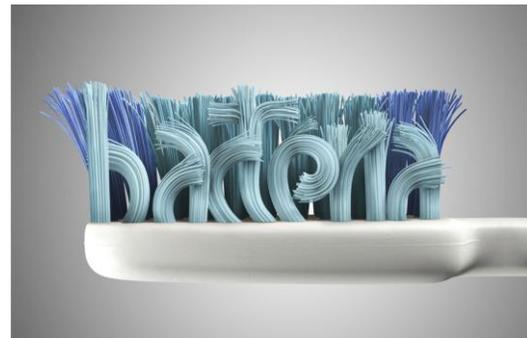
The toothbrush, that humble instrument meant to help you clean your teeth, remove plaque and prevent cavities may in addition may be home to very serious bacteria. Dr. Maria Geisinger, a periodontist at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) School of Dentistry in a recent study discovered the presence of staphylococci, coliforms, yeasts and intestinal bacteria on the toothbrushes.

“The oral cavity is home to hundreds of different types of microorganisms, which can be transferred to a toothbrush during use.” Dr. Geisinger said in a UAB press release. Not surprisingly, specific bacteria are known to cause tooth decay and other periodontal disease, the two primary dental diseases in adults. Perhaps even worse, your toothbrush may carry *fecal* bacteria.

“Most toothbrushes are stored in bathrooms, which expose them to a host of gastrointestinal microorganisms that may then be transferred via a fecal-oral route,” Dr. Geisinger said.

According to Dr. Geisinger, “These organisms, called enteric bacteria, can transfer to toothbrushes and then into people’s mouths due to inadequate hand-washing or the microscopic droplets released from the toilet during flushing.”

The Discovery Channel TV show “Mythbusters” tested 24 toothbrushes and found enteric microorganisms on all of them— even those that had not been stored inside a bathroom.



What can you do to help reduced bacteria and other *gross stuff* making a home on your toothbrush?

Clean your toothbrush. Dr. Novack advises you should throughouly rinse your toothbrush with warm-hot tap water after brushing to remove any remaining tooth-paste and debris. It is safe to say that toothbrushes should be cleaned as diligently as you clean your own teeth and gums. We also recommend soaking your toothbrushes in an antibacterial mouth rinse (Peridex[®]) either over night or at a minimum, 15 minutes daily.

Proper toothbrush storage. After each use position your toothbrush upright to allow it to air dry. Don't store your toothbrush in a closed container because damp environments are conducive to bacteria and fungal growth. Every individual has a unique constellation of oral bacteria. Similarly, we all have differing resistance and susceptibility to bacteria and other microorganisms. It is very important that if more than one brush is stored in an area, keep them well separated to prevent cross-contamination.

Change tooth brushes regularly. As supported by the periodontal literature, Dr. Novack recommends that toothbrushes be replaced every three months. Should the bristles of your toothbrush become frayed or worn within two months, this may indicate you are being too *heavy handed* ! Should you notice this happening, please bring in your toothbrush in at your next visit so that we can make suggestions to improve your oral hygiene efforts. As part of our commitment to maintain your oral health, our patients are provided with a new CDA approved manual toothbrushes at each periodontal supportive maintenance visit. As most patients in our practice are seen on a three month schedule, your visit likely corresponds with the time to discard your old brush.

Sharing is an attribute in life, but not with toothbrushes! Although this may seem self evident, a significant proportion of spouses admit to sharing toothbrushes. You should realize such a practice also means you are sharing the bacteria that reside on and within your toothbrush.

If you've been sick, get a new brush! It has been well established that illnesses are transmitted through body fluids . Be sure to separate the toothbrush of the infected individual from the rest of the family. If at all possible, Dr. Novack urges you to consider replacing your toothbrush upon your recovery.

Wash, Wash, Wash! Despite the proliferation for alcohol based hand sanitizers, there is truly no substitute for effective hand washing. Below is a diagram of appropriate hand washing. Please do wash your hands after using the toilet and prior to using your toothbrush. As noted in the Birmingham study, 100% all toothbrushes contained fecal bacteria. Aside from the *gross* factor, these gastro-intestinal tract bacteria are very pathogenic-disease causing.

