

A brush with hygiene

There is more to buying and taking care of a toothbrush than it appears, writes **Sushma Veera**

FROM the time we're young, we're taught that brushing regularly is one of the best ways to keep our teeth and gums healthy. Using the right toothbrush is important since the wrong kind can cause damage to gums and teeth. But with so many shapes, sizes and styles of toothbrush in the market, which is the right one?

Consultant dental surgeon Dr Muhammad Nazli Haffiz says many people fail to consider the importance of buying a toothbrush.

"Awareness of oral hygiene is lacking as people focus on hair and skincare," says Dr Nazli.

"The flood of choices confuses consumers in choosing the right toothbrush."

THE RIGHT ONE

Do not be overwhelmed by the many choices when buying a toothbrush. There are only two things that you need to figure out:

- The softness of the bristles: Go for the softest bristles you can get. Some may argue that the soft ones do not clean as well and get frayed much sooner but these mental drawbacks can be overcome with knowledge and awareness. Hard bristles coupled with aggressive brushing will expose you to potential gum recession and teeth sensitivities later. If soft bristles aren't clean enough for you, repeat brushing.

- The grip of the handle: Get the most comfortable handling toothbrush for you; the one that your mum or spouse is using may not be the best for you. The problem is you can't feel the grip of the toothbrushes as most are covered in their plastic packaging. So it is a trial and error process but as you need a change of toothbrush after a few months, getting it wrong the first time doesn't mean the end.

COVERED VS IN THE OPEN

"Keeping the toothbrush in a dry cabinet or storing it in a glass is more than enough. Preferably the bristles are dried after brushing but not to the extent of drying it with a hair



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Dr Muhammad Nazli

dryer. As long as the toothbrush is cleaned of residual toothpaste and/or food debris and tartar, you're good to go," says Dr Muhammad Nazli.

He talks about an episode in the television series *Mythbusters*, where a test was done to gauge bacteria accumulation if a toothbrush is kept in the open in the bathroom.

"Basically the *Mythbusters* team did not find any difference in the amount of bacteria in toothbrushes kept out in the bathroom or otherwise. This was not a peer-reviewed scientific study, but it does suggest that covering your toothbrush makes an insignificant difference."

REPLACING YOUR TOOTHBRUSH

"The basic rule is around three months, but some toothbrush manufacturers incorporate a visual gauge on their toothbrushes as a reminder. Technically, once the bristles are frayed and cannot clean teeth well, then the brush has to go."

SHARING IS NOT CARING

"No, it is not wise to share a toothbrush. Different people may have different types and amount of normal flora (bacteria) in the mouth and during brushing more than 90 per cent of people will experience a degree of gum bleeding. So, in the worst case, sharing toothbrushes may expose the individuals to infections, which through bleeding gums may enable the bacteria to travel into the blood stream.

"A private dentist in the UK summed up the sharing of toothbrush as having unprotected sex; for a long time you will get away with it, but if you run out of luck you will pick up something nasty."

Toothy tales

FOR some, the mention of a toothbrush brings back memories, putting a smile on their face.

Personally, there's one incident that my husband and I often talk about. Each time we travel, we carry our own toothbrushes, the blue toothbrush is his and any other colour is mine.

During a trip to my hometown, hubby kept his brush in a toothbrush holder in the bathroom. Moments later, Mum started grumbling that someone had used her brush which she uses for her dentures!

After much finger pointing, we realised that both hubby and Mum had the same coloured toothbrushes. While hubby would never dream of using Mum's, after that incident, he makes sure that he keeps his brush back in the travelling pouch after use.

And Mum decided to get her own brush holder.

Talk about a close "brush"! Anyway, here are some toothbrush stories to tickle your funny tooth:

NADIA HENG, MISS MALAYSIA WORLD2010

I remember how occasionally we'd have a team of nurses pop by my primary school, armed with new toothbrushes and little tubes of toothpaste. It was quite a sight as they were on a mission to perfect our brushing techniques. It was all quite exciting, mainly because we were called out from class!



CHEF TOMMES, CELEBRITY CHEF FOR ASIAN FOOD CHANNEL

I was on an expedition to Lake Turkana in Kenya when my car broke down. I was rescued by the Samburu tribe and stayed a few days with them. The men chewed on finger-thick sticks all day long to clean their teeth. I saw men going to a tree, break off twigs, crush one end and rub it over their teeth. They call the tree, the "toothbrush tree". Apparently the wood has antiseptic properties.



ROB WEEDEN, GENERAL MANAGER, TRADERS HOTEL, KUALA LUMPUR

The electric toothbrush is a fabulous invention. Though I may own one but I end up not using it. My lovely wife Karen frequently forgets to put it back on the charger. Every morning, being half awake, whenever I try to use it, it goes dead after three seconds, so I end up having to brush my teeth the "old school" way.



JULIE SONG, RESTAURATEUR

I have a friend who was once an au pair and worked for a family in New York. Her job was to look after the children and do some cleaning up. She didn't like the people she worked for as they weren't too appreciative.

So one day she got their toothbrushes and dipped them in the toilet and put them back for use the next time they brushed their teeth. The moral of the story is... be nice to your maid or hide your toothbrush.



ANEETA SUNDARARAJ, FREELANCE WRITER

Since my dachshund, Ladoo, is one of the family, I didn't see why I couldn't use Colgate to brush her teeth. So, with an old toothbrush in one hand and a generous amount of Colgate squeezed on it, I sat on the floor, in front of her. With the other hand, I held Ladoo's chin and asked her to open her mouth. She absolutely refused. After 10 minutes of cajoling, coaxing and scolding her, I gave up. Then, I could hear Ladoo making funny sounds and turned to see if she was all right. With one paw on the end of the Colgate tube, she was squeezing the toothpaste out and licking it. While my vet is probably mortified reading this, the upshot was that Ladoo had lovely minty breath the whole day.

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Ladoo likes her toothpaste

Keep bacteria out!

A TOOTHBRUSH is a common breeding ground for bacteria and fungi, as it's often wet and can be contaminated by bathroom bacteria coming from toilet flushes, moist surfaces, and contact with other toothbrushes. Colgate's new 360o AntiBacterial toothbrush

with Silver Zeolite (an antibacterial agent) technology inhibits bacterial growth on bristles for up to 90 days and removes up to 96 per cent bacteria. The Malaysian Dental Association recommends changing your toothbrush at least once every three

months—the effective period of this toothbrush's antibacterial technology. It also has a tongue and cheek cleaner, inter-dental bristles, polishing cups that help remove stains for a whiter smile and an ergonomic handle for a slip-free grip.

