



# DENTAL UPDATE

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## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### WHAT IS THE BEST TOOTHBRUSH?

Good question. The best brush is always the softest. This is because soft bristles flex more and extend better into the gaps and crevices that the hard brushes just skim over. Hard brushes might feel better but they are ineffective where plaque actually collects.



The brand does not matter particularly but avoid the ones with gimmicks like tongue scrapers and rubber inserts. The **Macleans Flex Soft** and the **Colgate Slim Soft** are both good brushes.

### WHAT ABOUT ELECTRIC BRUSHES?

They can be very good or bad, depending on how they are used. It is important to actually *brush*, exactly the same as with a normal toothbrush. Try this – turn the power off and actually scrub the teeth, opening halfway, around in circles and including the gums. If this technique is used an electric brush will do an excellent job of cleaning.

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## THE BLACK SWAN OF DENTISTRY

Up until the last three centuries Europeans assumed that all swans were white. Anything else was inconceivable. During the 17<sup>th</sup> century the term, 'Black Swan', in fact referred to something that was impossible, like a flying pig. Then in 1697 Dutch sailors bumped into the west coast of Australia and discovered *what* in the Swan River? Black Swans!

Recently the expression has become a metaphor for any development that is totally unexpected - like the rise of the internet or satellite navigation. Even in science fiction, these things were completely unforeseen.



Dentistry's black swan moment came in the 1970s when companies produced white materials they claimed would actually adhere to teeth. Some dentists used to snigger – it was like suggesting in the future every family would own a computer. Everyone knew that a decent computer took up the size of a lounge room and cost millions.

Today adhesive fillings are as real as the laptop or iPad. White 'composite resin' is hard and strong and can bond tenaciously to enamel for decades.

There are two or three great benefits. Because fillings no longer have to lock into a tooth like a piece of jigsaw, drilling can be reduced by half. Front teeth can be reshaped and coloured, effectively with artificial enamel, to completely change a smile. Have a look at [www.dentalupdate.info](http://www.dentalupdate.info) for some examples. And, of course, the fillings come in a hundred different shades of white.

Bonded fillings can look so natural, it is sometimes impossible to pick them. While their appearance is realistic, they can also add strength to the actual tooth. They are like the graceful swan—beautiful on the surface, hard working below.

## MOUSSE

Tooth Mousse is a milk extract which hardens enamel and reduces sensitivity by pumping calcium and phosphate into the surface.

Sometimes it can even arrest early decay and help repair superficial damage.

But it also leads to less plaque accumulating because food debris and bacteria find it harder to stick to strong, sound enamel.



If teeth are soft and vulnerable there are a number of reasons to rub in Tooth Mouse two or three times a week.

## WHAT IS THE BEST MOUTHWASH?

A better question would be – does anyone need a mouthwash? Usually the answer is no, one probably needs to brush a little better.

Most washes have more marketing than efficacy. They kill only some surface bacteria and those that survive can quickly grow back if food debris remains around crevices and gum margins to act as a nutrient.

Occasionally, though, a special mouthwash can be of benefit, especially for managing gingivitis. **Curasept** contains the strong antiseptic *chlorhexidine*, which tends to bind to tooth surfaces and remain in the mouth, making its effect against bacteria longer acting. Think of it only as an adjunct to improved brushing and a means of kick-starting a treatment program. To be effective it should be used in conjunction with Curasept toothpaste.

Most pharmacies do not stock these products but they can be purchased locally.



## WHAT IS THE BEST TOOTHPASTE?

Colgate Total is a good, every day toothpaste for adults.

On the other hand, some people are especially vulnerable to decay. A few individuals have teeth that are naturally soft and have an ongoing history of caries. Likewise, senior citizens and those taking, for instance, blood pressure medications and suffering Dry Mouth are particularly at risk because of reduced salivary flow.



Colgate **NeutraFluor 5000 Plus** has five times the normal level of fluoride and is designed to harden weak enamel. The extra fluoride acts as a catalyst to pump mineral back into the enamel and it changes the composition of the crystals from wimpy hydroxy apatite into tough, acid resistant fluoro apatite.

In addition, the higher fluoride concentration reduces bacteria in the mouth, just like the antiseptic mouthwashes are supposed to do.

To be effective, do not rinse out after brushing, simply spit the toothpaste foam out. If you think about it, any agent like fluoride has to stay in contact with the teeth for a period of time to be effective. The same applies for those using regular toothpaste who want to minimise their chances of ever getting decay.

Finding the best toothpaste for sensitive teeth is a whole topic in itself. See Sensitivity over the page.

## WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO WHITEN TEETH?



The only way to noticeably lighten teeth is with home bleaching. This involves wearing a little plastic tray with a bleach of carbamide peroxide inside for a couple hours every day over two to four weeks.

The easiest way to do this is to simply wear it to bed. It is proven to work and one can see the difference.



There are no long term side effects but some people do report sensitivity to cold during the process. This can easily be managed by rubbing in a combination of Tooth Mousse and either Neutrafluor 5000 Sensitive or Sensodyne.

If you want to know more, look up the leading world authority's website [www.vanhaywood.com](http://www.vanhaywood.com).

## CAN'T TEETH BE WHITENED IN THE DENTAL CHAIR?

It would be great if teeth could really be whitened in an hour at the dentist but the reality is they can not. Despite lights and lasers and marketing, 'Office Bleaching' is basically ineffective. The peroxide chemicals involved always require time to whiten enamel, irrespective of how strong they may be and an hour is insufficient. There is some transient effect because teeth dry out and look more opaque when the mouth is kept open, but it soon passes.

Of course, thorough professional cleaning is different from trying to change the intrinsic colour of teeth. The best way to remove coffee, tea or tobacco stains is with our sodium bicarbonate Prophy Jet spray. It renders teeth spotless in a few seconds.

## DO ANY OVER-THE-COUNTER PRODUCTS WHITEN TEETH?

Research shows some *do* have a very tiny effect, but probably too minor to actually notice.

Listerine Whitening mouthwash contains a small concentration of hydrogen peroxide which is slightly antibacterial and liable to whiten by a minute degree. Do not expect to see any real difference.

## JENNIFER TARANTO, ARTIST



Some years ago I tried my hand at painting and, over time, the landscapes and portraits I produced found their way onto the surgery walls.

The family much preferred the quality of the framing to the actual pictures and would regularly complain 'Why don't you put up some real art work that people might enjoy?' (Family can be cruel.)

Finally I have acquiesced, but only because some spectacular paintings have become available.

Jennifer is an accomplished and successful professional artist who exhibits regularly. She has kindly agreed to hang some of her pictures in the clinic, so turning the rooms into a minor art gallery. All paintings are for sale.

More of Jennifer's work may be accessed on her excellent website [www.jataranto.com.au](http://www.jataranto.com.au) and she may be reached on 0417 059 252.

## SENSITIVITY

Treating sensitivity is big business these days - just check the advertisements on television. There are so many different approaches. Even Colgate have four or five products designed to reduce sensitivity. The trouble is - there is no single best treatment.

Firstly, a quick background. Pastes can either strengthen teeth or treat the symptoms by slowing nerve transmission. Products like Sensodyne contain potassium nitrate which reduces sensory transmission in the pulp, so the tooth does not hurt as much. Other products seek to harden the tooth by thickening its tubules with extra mineral.

A sensible treatment is a combination.

Colgate **NeutraFluor 5000 Sensitive** has a high fluoride content, to strengthen, and 5% potassium nitrate to soothe the sensitivity.

**Recaldent Tooth Mousse**, from the dentist, is the best of all for increasing tooth density and, unlike the latest fad products, has been researched extensively by serious academics.

It is a milk based cream which is overflowing with calcium and phosphate to toughen teeth and block those troublesome tubules. Use the two together. Brush with the paste and then rub in the mousse. Do not rinse them off, just spit out the excess.

And of course, use a soft brush and never, ever scrub sideways!

## POSITIVE FEEDBACK

A young guy at the gym recently told me I was really fit - for forty five! I thanked him sincerely and suggested he see an optometrist - if he could see at all.

It is always nice to receive a compliment. When new patients arrive we usually ask how they happened to choose our clinic. Occasionally someone will say I was recommended by a friend but often the answer is 'No, I live around the corner and saw the sign.' For all they know I may not be any good, but at least I am local. And it is certainly better than friends recommending they *not* see me.

I was asked to return a phone call from the ADA office a few weeks back. At first I presumed it was about why my annual subscription were still unpaid. But no, it was a request to reprint for Dental Health Week an article I had published three years earlier in the monthly News Bulletin.

The paper was *The Case For Minimal Intervention Dentistry*, about treating decay with less drilling. It explains how enamel can remineralise and decay bacteria die off when exposed to the correct antiseptics. I have written a few articles and this was the only the second to ever to receive positive comments amongst Letters to the Editor. One professor described it as 'excellent.'

It has been pleasing seeing the piece in print again and even more so knowing the odd spelling mistake has been corrected. Mostly, though, it was nice to get a pat on the back, particularly for a young dentist of just forty five.

## BRUSHING HINT

Even the best tooth brushes have trouble cleaning the inside of the lower teeth, especially on their right hand side (for right handers.)

The difficulty is manual dexterity. It is hard to turn the wrist and angle the brush downwards.

Here is a hint. For this awkward area, use a different grip.

Hold the brush across the palm at a right angle to the arm. Then lift the elbow up high, to shoulder level. The bristles will naturally aim downwards.



# WHAT THE MOVIES CAN TEACH US ABOUT DENTAL TREATMENT

There is a scene in the old movie *The Madness of King George* where the poor demented king, being subjected to various humiliating and degrading therapies complains 'You can not do this to me! I am... I am - THE KING!'

To which his physician replies 'No sir. You are THE PATIENT!'

It is not easy being a patient, whether medical or dental.

Another movie, *The Doctor*, described the situation well, with William Hurt playing the high powered surgeon who is suddenly hospitalised with cancer. In the space of a few days he goes from being an authority figure to the one who feels vulnerable and violated. It is a complete role reversal and, by the end, the experience has cured both his illness and his arrogance.



In reality the problem is not pain, because there is very little, but uncertainty and the feeling of just not being in charge! As adults we can make responsible decisions as to whether the doctor/dentist is competent and whether a treatment makes sense, but, once a procedure commences, the responsibility for a successful outcome shifts to someone else.

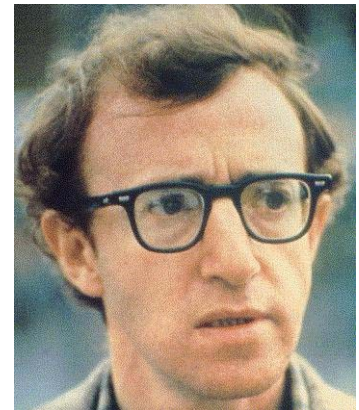
So are there any strategies to make the dental experience less daunting?

Some people like to take an interest in the details of the treatment and even check the various steps on the video monitor.

This is not for everybody but some of

the work *is* fascinating and we encourage patients to at least understand the basics of what is being done.

Alternatively, most folks like to listen to the music on the headphones, zone out and pretend they are somewhere else. To paraphrase Woody Allen, 'I am not afraid of dental treatment. I just don't want to be there when it happens.'



## ALTERNATIVELY...

There may be another way still.

When some of us were school children back in the fifties and we grazed our knee or sprained an ankle, the advice from the teachers invariably was 'Offer it up for the poor suffering souls in purgatory.'

For years I assumed every little scratch and bruise might at least do some good for those poor sods struggling to cleanse their souls and make their way through the pearly gates.

Apart from the occasional *Hail Mary*, I stoically suffered in silence, sure in the belief I was at least benefitting the faithful.

Did I ever receive any thanks? Not even a note!

No email, no phone call, not even a curt text message.

If dental treatment is daunting, one can perhaps offer it up for the poor suffering souls. Just do not expect any gratitude in return.

## CHEWING GUM

Chewing gum may look a little anti-social but it can help the teeth, especially when it's a sugar free gum containing xylitol.

Chewing, just of itself, stimulates saliva, which protects and replenishes teeth's surfaces. This is important because food and plaque acids constantly leach away tiny amounts of mineral from enamel.

In a healthy mouth this mineral is quickly replaced because saliva coats the surface with abundant amounts of calcium and phosphate. It is rather like the tide in the bay rolling back and forth – the overall level stays the same.



Things can start to go wrong when *Dry Mouth* develops due to medication or advancing years.

Mucosa becomes uncomfortable and teeth start to soften, even to the point of decay. Chewing gum, on the other hand, can help keep the saliva moving.

In addition, the artificial sweetener

Xylitol reduces plaque by specifically inhibiting the growth of decay's main bacteria, *Streptococcus Mutans*.

It also raises the pH in the mouth which further encourages calcium and phosphate to remineralise enamel surfaces.

Chewing gum will not guarantee that one will end up fielding at first slip for Australia but it may help the teeth slightly.