

Oral Health Foundation | Fact sheets

# Toothbrushes



**Oral Health  
Foundation**

Better oral health for all

# Toothbrushes

The toothbrush has, for many years, been the most effective form of plaque removal. The standard recommendation has always been a toothbrush with soft to medium filaments, a small head and a straight handle. However, there are now many different shapes and sizes available in both handle and head design and the market continues to grow.

There are several factors to take into consideration when choosing a toothbrush. The main areas being:

## Head

The head of the toothbrush should not be too large as to make brushing awkward, but should not be too small as to make it too time consuming. The average head size should be about 2 cm in length and 1cm broad. It should be smooth and rounded in shape with no sharp edges.

## Bristles

The filaments (bristles) of the brush should be 'end-rounded' nylon filaments. Nylon has been preferable to natural bristle for some time due to better quality and size control. The fact that the composition changes only slightly when wet makes the brush potentially cleaner. Nylon bristles are inert, and are therefore relatively harmless if they are swallowed.

It is generally recommended that the bristles should be end-rounded. The technique of 'end rounding' involves rounding off all sharp edges and ends of filaments, therefore reducing the risk of damaging the soft tissues.

## Texture

The toothbrush should ideally have medium-textured bristles. Filaments that are too hard may cause gum recession and enamel abrasion.

## Neck

The neck of the toothbrush should be slim, but not so slim as to make it breakable and should not be too long as this can cause difficulty with brushing. A handle that is too long can lead to a lack of control and cause choking or tissue damage. If the neck is too short, it will not reach adequately and therefore make brushing inefficient. An angled neck may be beneficial in increasing accessibility to certain areas of the mouth. A flexible neck limits the amount of pressure that can be applied, therefore reducing the risk of tissue damage.

## Handle

The handle of the brush should be comfortable to hold, with some kind of additional grip facility. This could be a section of rubber, which is attached to the handle, or grooving in the plastic, however the grooves should not

be deep enough as to gather dirt. It should be remembered that the toothbrush will be used with water and therefore a smooth handle may lead to slipping, causing tissue damage or choking. A chunky handle is preferable for both comfort and ease of grip.

## Children's brushes

Children's brushes should be scaled down versions of the adult toothbrush. They should be interesting and colourful in order to motivate the child.

### 0 - 2 years

The handle should be chunky and a little longer than an average child's brush, as the parent will be required to perform the brushing. The head should be small and compact, again to prevent any damage to soft tissues.

Parents should be advised to start brushing as soon as the teeth start to erupt.

### 2 - 8 years

A child starts learning to brush at a fairly young age; the child will often chew on the brush, but will still need help from the parent in actually cleaning the teeth. As the child develops, the brushing technique will also develop although parental supervision is still necessary and often the parent will be required to complete the task.

Again, a small head with compact filaments is necessary, but a wider handle is usually required, as a child's grip can be somewhat unstable. It is important at this age to motivate the child, often with cartoon characters and colourful designs.

### 8 - 14 years

Children of this age are much more competent and able to maintain their own oral hygiene routine. However it is even more important to keep the child's interest in order to encourage regular brushing. The design should be suitable for the age group to which it is aimed. The jaws grow and as the mouth becomes bigger a slimmer, longer handle is necessary along with a compact head.

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## Need further advice?

The Dental Helpline is the Oral Health Foundation's own confidential advice service. Qualified dental professionals are available to answer your questions personally from 9am – 5pm, Monday to Friday.

 **Dental  
Helpline**  
**01788 539780**  
Oral Health Foundation

The Oral Health Foundation is an independent, UK based charity dedicated to promoting the benefits of good oral health to the public throughout the world. The Oral Health Foundation promotes three key messages:

- Brush your teeth last thing at night and at least one other time during the day, with a fluoride toothpaste.
- Cut down on how often you have sugary snacks and drinks.
- Visit your dentist regularly, as often as they recommend.

**Visit us online at [www.dentalhealth.org](http://www.dentalhealth.org)**