

A Great Dental Tool—Small Inter-dental Brushes



This cross between a toothpick and a toothbrush is new to me but has been around for several years (and may be an old friend for you). Since Mary and I have started using this tool after every meal we have noticed a remarkable improvement in the health of our gums and an overall clean feeling in our mouths. Even though

Mary and I floss and brush our teeth at least twice a day, our big surprise was the small food particles still left between our teeth, which were removed by using these small inter-dental brushes. The real proof of benefits from using this tool daily was the reduction in the size of the “pockets” reported on the very next dental hygiene visit for Mary. Pockets are the space between the tooth and the gum. Enlarging spaces are caused by bacterial growth, resulting in gingivitis and periodontitis. It only makes sense that small particles of food left between the teeth feed the bacteria. Inter-dental brushing effectively removes this food.



Teeth can be loosened and lost due to gum disease. Many of my patients have suffered with gum disease serious enough for their dentist to recommend a deep cleaning procedure called scaling and gum surgery. To prevent and even reverse gum disease I recommend thorough cleaning with traditional tooth brushing, inter-dental brushing, flossing, and regular visits to the dental hygienist.

There are many brands of inter-dental brushes. Choose the most for your money. Some are designed to be used once, and then discarded; others have a holder, which is always lost. Some bend with the slightest pressure. The brushes have different shapes – square, round, tapered. Some are too thick to go between the teeth. Personal preference is important. My copy editor’s (Betty Bryant’s) current favorite is G.U.M soft-picks, which are really inexpensive and have a convenient little carry-case. They can also be used alone, in situations where you cannot brush and floss. For example, out to dinner. You can always excuse yourself to go to the restroom for 5 minutes and a quick cleanup.

A healthy diet is also essential. A sub-analysis of the largest diet and health study in the U.S., Third National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (The NHANES III study) representing nearly 100 million US adults, found “people with fewer than 28 teeth had significantly lower intakes of carrots, tossed salads, and dietary fiber (only found in plants) than did fully dentate people, and lower serum levels for beta carotene, folate, and vitamin C (all three nutrients come only from plants).”¹ They concluded, “Dental status significantly affects diet and nutrition.” Why not the other way around? “Diet and nutrition significantly affect dental status.”

Poor dentition has long been known to be associated with heart disease. A study of 83,104 US women investigated dietary intake and the number of natural teeth present, and found edentulous (no teeth) women had dietary intakes associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular diseases (CVD), including a significantly higher intake of saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol and vitamin B12, and a lower intake of polyunsaturated fat, fiber, carotene, vitamin C, vitamin E, vitamin B6, folate, potassium, vegetables, and fruits, compared with women with 25-32 teeth.² The authors concluded: “Diet may partially explain associations between oral health and cardiovascular disease.” Think about it this way: The McDougall Diet will afford you the best chance to stay alive long enough to enjoy your strong healthy teeth.

Examples of Inter-dental Brushes

[Proxabrush](#) by Butler (G.U.M)

[Piksters](#) Interdental Brushes

[Oral-B](#) Inter-dental Brushes

[TePe](#) Interdental Brushes

References:

1) Nowjack-Raymer RE, Sheiham A. Numbers of natural teeth, diet, and nutritional status in US adults. *J Dent Res.* 2007 Dec;86(12):1171-5.

2) Hung HC, Colditz G, Joshipura KJ. The association between tooth loss and the self-reported intake of selected CVD-related nutrients and foods among US women.

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