

THERE IS NO HEALTH WITHOUT GOOD ORAL HEALTH*

By Carol Van Aernam, RDH, BA

TOOTHBRUSHES: The main purpose of a toothbrush is to remove plaque and bacteria from your mouth. Proper brushing twice a day helps to reduce infection, risk for dental decay, gum disease, tooth loss, and bad breath.

Question: How do I choose the right manual toothbrush?

Answer: Always choose a soft bristle toothbrush, it will remove plaque/bacteria, prevent bleeding gums (gingivitis) and protect exposed root surfaces. The size of the toothbrush depends on the size of your mouth, so choose the size that is most comfortable.

Question: Which is better, Electric/Battery Toothbrushes or Manual Toothbrushes?

Answer: Electric/battery toothbrushes clean teeth more effectively. If you have had a stroke, arthritis, or dementia it is easier to brush your teeth and remove the plaque.

Question: How often do I need to replace my toothbrush?

Answer: Every 3 months, when bristles are frayed, or after an illness.

Question: How do you keep a toothbrush clean and safe to use?

Answer: Rinse with water and tap on sink to remove debris, allow toothbrush to dry between uses. Store toothbrush handle down in a container, or store in a toothbrush case with holes for ventilation. Never allow toothbrush to come into contact with a hairbrush, razor, or other items. Do not store toothbrush in an open container next to the toilet. Do not put the toothbrush in the microwave or dishwasher as it might damage the toothbrush.

Question: Can a toothbrush be shared?

Answer: NO! Billions of bacteria live on a toothbrush. You would have an increased risk for developing an infection or transmitting a disease.

**Surgeon General, Report on Oral Health, 2000*

All health and long term service and support (LTSS) professionals/caregivers are expected to work within their Scopes of Practice or job descriptions as defined by the State or employer. Family caregivers are encouraged to contact the dental or medical provider before making changes to a loved one's care plan.

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Meet Carol, a Registered Dental Hygienist and a Mouth Care Matters consultant and instructor.

Carol Van Aernam is a Mouth Care Matters (MCM) instructor and consultant for Iowa CareGivers. She plays a key role in planning, promoting, and teaching MCM. Carol worked in private dental practice for several years and 34 years for the Veterans Administration and Central Iowa Health Care System as a dental hygienist. She specializes in geriatric care and has presented programs at the local and national levels to those who work in direct care, dietitians, dentists, dental hygienists, and other caregivers. In addition, Carol served as an adjunct instructor for Des Moines Area Community College (DMACC) and the University of Iowa.