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Caring for, Cleaning and Replacing Your Toothbrush

How long has it been since you started using that toothbrush you used this morning? Is it fairly new? Is it a month old? Two? Three? Is it older than that? If you're still using the same toothbrush you were using three months ago or worse, even longer, then get yourself to the store and purchase a new one as soon as possible!

You need to regularly replace your toothbrush because over time, the bristles are going to start breaking down. You'll know when this is happening because they'll start looking frayed and they'll flare outwards. Once this breakdown starts to happen, it's not going to be possible for your toothbrush to work as effectively or efficiently as one with bristles that are standing straight up.

If your toothbrush is relatively new but you've just gotten over a cold or the flu, or if you've had a cold sore, an infection in your mouth, or a sore throat, it's a good idea to throw out the toothbrush you used during that sickness or infection. Bacteria can live among a toothbrush's bristles and using that toothbrush may cause reinfection.

Bacteria can also grow on toothbrush bristles when you haven't been sick, especially if bristles aren't thoroughly rinsed after each use. Food particles can remain on bristles and that can lead to the development of bacteria, another reason why frequently changing your toothbrush is a good idea.

After you've finished brushing your teeth, it takes only a moment to ensure that your toothbrush is clean. Remember, its job is to remove food particles and plaque from your teeth, which it does, but sometimes those particles that have been removed will stick between the bristles of your toothbrush. While you are rinsing the excess toothpaste and foam from the toothbrush, be sure to rinse away any food particles too. When you're done rinsing, take a close look at the bristles. If needed, rinse again.

Some people think that sticking their toothbrush in the dishwasher or the microwave oven is an effective way to clean/sanitize it. The truth is, these environments are too harsh for most toothbrushes and will only cause them to become damaged.

After you've rinsed your toothbrush, it needs to air dry to inhibit the growth of bacteria. Always store your toothbrush upright in an open container. Don't lie it down inside a drawer and don't enclose your toothbrush inside a case or other type of airtight container. With no air circulation, the moisture will create an environment ripe for bacteria growth.

To prevent cross-contamination, you never want the head of your toothbrush to touch the head of another toothbrush either. It's also not a good idea to share your toothbrush with others. To date, there's not been any solid proof that toothbrush sanitizers or mouth rinses with antibacterial agents offer any better protection than good cleaning habits so read the product's claims carefully before making any purchases.

And always remember – when in doubt, throw it out!

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