

YOUR DENTAL HEALTH

No. 13 — Dental Products Consumerism

It seems that hardly a month goes by that we don't see or hear an advertisement for a new dental health product. With so many new products to choose from, it becomes increasingly difficult to sort out the types of products that are important and the brands that are useful and effective.

The best advice, of course, is to follow the recommendations of your family dentist. He may suggest a particular oral hygiene aid for your personal needs, and he may recommend a particular brand. Don't hesitate to ask him for his opinion on products.

There are some general things that you should know, however, in order to be a wise consumer of oral health products.

A continual, independent review of several of the most commercially manufactured products is conducted by the American Dental Association. The Association has allowed products that have been proven useful and safe to carry statements of ADA acceptance on packaging and in advertising.

Consumers can look for acceptance by the Association's Council on Dental Therapeutics on toothpastes and the ADA Council on Dental Materials and Devices on powered toothbrushes, oral irrigators and denture adhesives.

To maintain a product's acceptance rating, the manufacturer must adhere to the Association's advertising code. Consumer advertising for ADA-accepted products must be completely accurate in fact as well as in implication and proof must be available on demand. No other health profession benefits from as comprehensive an advertising evaluation process.

The ADA has no governmental regulatory control over manufacturers. It has exerted its influence mainly by weight of its professional opinion.

Two dental products, floss and manual toothbrushes, are simple in design and function and the dentist can easily evaluate their usefulness for each patient.

Dental floss comes waxed and unwaxed. While many dentists recommend unwaxed as doing the better job of removing bacterial plaque, people with tightly-spaced teeth may find it easier to use waxed floss. The important point is to use floss daily in

the manner prescribed by your dentist or his auxiliary in order to remove the plaque which can cause tooth decay and periodontal or gum disease.

A special toothbrush may also be recommended by your dentist. The type that matches the greatest number of people is a brush with soft, multi-tufted, round-end bristles. Be certain that the head of the brush is small enough to reach all accessible areas in the mouth.

Powered brushes are much more complex. The methods of obtaining power, the safety in design and various other factors are considered before ADA acceptance is given to a product. No one has been able to satisfactorily show that either manual or powered brushing is superior. If the patient tends to be more thorough and consistent in his use of one type as opposed to the other, that type should probably be his choice. Because of their novelty, children may find the powered toothbrush appealing and use it more often than the manual toothbrush. Persons with certain physical handicaps find powered toothbrushes easier to use.

Oral irrigating devices use a direct spray of water to remove loose food particles and other material from about the teeth. They cannot take the place of either the toothbrush or dental floss in removing bacterial plaque, but for certain patients they are an effective additional aid to promote oral cleanliness. Patients with orthodontic bands or fixed partial dentures in particular may find oral irrigators helpful.

A mouthwash can temporarily freshen your breath or sweeten your mouth. However, it does not remove plaque and cannot prevent decay or gum disease.

Commercial mouthwashes available without prescription are cosmetic, but, unfortunately, advertisers sometimes imply wider benefits. The ADA Council on Dental Therapeutics discourages the use of medicated mouthwashes for unsupervised use by the general public.

Offensive breath may indicate poor oral health or other bodily disorders. A mouthwash simply masks the basic problem. The general use of mouthwashes can be considered to serve no greater purpose than as an aid in the removal of loose food and debris.

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(Next article: "Dentrifices")