

# The Nitty-gritty on Toothpaste

Toothpaste has many functions: It delivers fluoride to prevent cavities, cleans your teeth by removing dental plaque and food from your teeth, polishes your teeth and removes stains surface over time, and freshens breath. Overall, toothpaste promotes good oral health.

## What's in toothpaste?

Toothpaste, also known as dentifrice, is available in paste or gel form.

Despite the many types of toothpaste that exist, some ingredients are common to most varieties. These include:

- **Abrasives**, such as silica, to brush away the leftover food and plaque on your teeth with the help of your toothbrush. Abrasives also polish your teeth and remove stains over time, making the teeth appear whiter.
- **Fluoride** to make the entire tooth structure more resistant to decay and promote remineralization, which makes your teeth stronger.
- **Antimicrobial/antigingivitis agents**, such as stannous fluoride or triclosan, to fight bacteria in dental plaque and gum disease.
- **Anti-tartar agents** to help prevent the formation of tartar, also referred to as calcified plaque.
- **Desensitizing agents**, such as stannous fluoride or potassium nitrate, to relieve tooth sensitivity.
- **Surfactants (detergents) and foaming agents** to carry away debris from the mouth and between teeth.
- **Binding agents** to bind all the components of the toothpaste together.
- **Humectant** to prevent your toothpaste from drying up.



- **Flavors and sweetening agents** to make the brushing experience more enjoyable.

## Why do toothpastes contain abrasives?

Like other products that are designed to clean, toothpastes contain abrasive agents to help remove stains from teeth. While toothpaste must be abrasive enough to remove surface stains and dental plaque, it must not be so abrasive that it wears away vital tooth enamel.

## How do I minimize the risk of tooth wear?

Wear on the teeth can be minimized by practicing proper brushing techniques,

which includes using short and gentle strokes in a circular motion with a soft-bristle brush.

## How do I know which toothpaste is right for me?

When it comes to choosing the best toothpaste for you, it's important to think about your unique oral health needs. Some toothpastes aim to alleviate pain associated with sensitive teeth. Some help to control plaque and tartar. Some are designed to remove stains and whiten teeth. Some do all of the above. Because each toothpaste is uniquely formulated to perform specific functions, speak with your dentist to determine which is right for you.

## Resources

[www.knowyourteeth.com](http://www.knowyourteeth.com)

Brought to you by the AGD, this Web site answers important dental health questions, offers the latest information on current treatments, provides tips for first-rate oral hygiene, and it can help visitors find highly qualified general dentists near where they live.

## 1.877.2X.A.YEAR

AGD's toll-free referral number. Call to locate an AGD member dentist in your area.

Published with permission by the Academy of General Dentistry. © Copyright 2010 by the Academy of General Dentistry. All rights reserved.