

# Why You Really Should Be Cleaning Your Toothbrush

*Toothbrushes can harbour bacteria, saliva and other contamination. Dentists explain how to clean them.*

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Dentists suggest you should clean your toothbrush after every use – so for most people, that’s twice a day. But are you doing it right?

Toothbrushes need to be cleaned as they harbour bacteria, other micro-organisms, saliva and other bodily contamination, says Professor Damien Walmsley, the British Dental Association’s scientific adviser.

And there’s a lot of the stuff. A study by the University of Manchester found there are [more than 10 million bacteria on each toothbrush](#).

Thankfully there is no evidence that a toothbrush will cause health problems (although experts agree more research needed in this area) – but it’s still good practice to keep your trusty toothbrush clean.

## **So how do you clean it?**

Well, there are a few options. “The best thing to do is wash your hands thoroughly with soap every time before brushing your teeth and again after,” says dental hygienist and founder of London Hygienist, Anna Middleton.

Then, simply rinse the bristles and handle under running water to remove any debris or toothpaste after use, and leave the toothbrush upright to dry. Don’t cover a wet brush with a holder, as germs and mould can build up.

To keep brushes clean and germ-free, people should avoid sharing toothbrushes with other family members and should keep their toothbrush away from the toilet, closing the lid every time they flush.

It’s thought aerosol spray from flushing can travel metres away from the toilet – and researchers from the University of Alabama made the rather grim discovery that brushes can become contaminated with faecal matter in the bristles, too.

If you want to do a little bit extra to clean your toothbrush, you can also swirl your brush head in antibacterial mouthwash for about 30 seconds to disinfect the bristles.

You might want to do this every couple of weeks, says dental specialist Dr Chaw-Su Kyi, of West London Orthodontist, and don’t forget to discard the mouthwash afterwards.

“Potentially, denture cleanser can be used [use according to the instructions],” she adds. “Denture cleanser is used to disinfect dentures which have a plastic component, and can be safely used on toothbrushes.”

If you want to clean the handle, you could also use an antibacterial wipe and use a toothbrush head cover to shield the bristles, suggests Middleton.

“There are also UV toothbrush sterilisers on the market that can help to kill some microorganisms,” she adds.

## **How often should you change your toothbrush?**

The general consensus is that you should be changing your toothbrush (or toothbrush head, if you use an electric brush) every three to four months – or four times a year – although Middleton suggests doing this sooner if you’ve been unwell.

“Flu viruses can live for up to three days on your brush so never share toothbrushes as you can make someone else sick,” she says. With Covid-19 doing the rounds, it’s even more important to keep on top of this.

It’s good practice to change the brush not only for hygiene reasons, but also because the bristles can start to fray after some time, which means you won’t be getting the best cleaning performance out of it.

On the whole, cleaning your brush is a good idea, whatever method you adopt. “It is all part of having a clean hygiene routine,” Dr Chaw-Su Kyi concludes. “We wash our hands, we would not consider wearing the same clothes everyday for a year, there is no reason to not rinse your brush with water after using it, nor to replace them every three months.”