How Often Should You Change Your Toothbrush? | Core Dental

Canonical: https://www.coredental.com.au/how-often-should-you-change-your-toothbrush/

Details:

Dental guidance commonly suggests replacing your toothbrush, or your electric toothbrush head, about every three to four months. At Core Dental we recommend changing it sooner if the bristles look frayed, worn or damaged, or after you have been unwell, so you do not reintroduce germs and bacteria into your mouth. A toothbrush removes plaque and microorganisms that can contribute to cavities and bad breath, but it keeps doing that job only while it is in good condition.

What is the usual interval for replacing a toothbrush?

A common recommendation is to change your toothbrush every three to four months. Many people find it easier to remember by swapping it at the start of each season. If you use an electric toothbrush, the same timing generally applies to the brush head. Your dentist or hygienist can tell you what suits you, because your oral health needs, the way you brush and the type of brush you use all play a part.

What signs show you should replace your toothbrush sooner?

You may need to replace your toothbrush earlier than every three to four months if:

the bristles are fraying, bent or flattened

the brush looks worn or damaged

you have been sick, so that you do not reintroduce germs and bacteria into your mouth

someone else has accidentally used it

If you press hard when you brush, the bristles can wear out faster. If you notice this, it is worth asking us to show you a gentler technique at your next visit.

Why is it important to change your toothbrush regularly?

Toothbrushes remove plaque and microorganisms that can cause cavities and bad breath. Contamination begins after the very first use and builds with every use after that. Regular replacement helps the toothbrush keep working effectively and avoids putting germs back into your mouth. A worn brush may also be less effective at cleaning along the gumline and between the teeth.

What role does a toothbrush play in oral hygiene?

Brushing is one of the main ways to keep your teeth and gums healthy. A toothbrush removes the soft film of plaque that forms on teeth every day. Left in place, plaque can lead to cavities, gum inflammation and bad breath. Brushing twice a day with fluoride toothpaste, together with cleaning between your teeth, is generally recommended. You can read more in our articles on brushing teeth the right way and why you should clean between your teeth .

Does a toothbrush stay clean after its first use?

No. Even after the first use, contamination can occur, and it increases with each use. Rinsing your toothbrush well after brushing, letting it air dry upright and keeping it apart from other people's brushes can help. Avoid covering a wet brush in a closed container, because moisture may encourage bacteria to grow.

How can you plan your care and make an informed decision?

A useful first step is to tell us about your concern, symptoms, timing and goals when you book. Bring relevant medical information and a list of your current medicines. Our team can then assess your teeth, gums, bite and surrounding tissues, request imaging where it is clinically appropriate, and explain which options suit you.

Ask what the recommended approach is intended to achieve, whether there are reasonable alternatives, what preparation and aftercare involve, and what risks or limitations apply. Treatment time, fees, recovery and maintenance vary with the diagnosis and the complexity of care. At Core Dental we quote before treatment starts, and a written treatment plan can help you compare stages, expected appointments and payment arrangements before you proceed.

Call 000 immediately for uncontrollable bleeding, breathing or swallowing difficulty, serious facial injury or other life-threatening symptoms. Do not wait for a dental appointment in these situations. For severe tooth pain or swelling without these emergency signs, contact your dental practice promptly. For routine care, prevention and review intervals should be tailored to your individual oral health risks rather than assumed to be the same for everyone.

How can we help?

If you would like advice on brushing, toothbrush choice or your general oral health, our team can help at any of our nine Core Dental clinics across Melbourne. Book a dental check-up or a hygiene appointment , call 13 13 16, or book online.

Which brush, before how often

Replacing a brush on schedule does not help much if the brush was the wrong shape to begin with. The published guidance is unusually specific about the head and the bristles, and it is the same specification for adults and children.

The Victorian Department of Health, for adults: "Use a toothbrush with a small head and soft bristles and a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste."

For children: "Choose a toothbrush that is designed for children. It should have a small head and soft bristles."

And in its erosion guidance, where worn enamel makes brush choice matter more: "Use a soft-bristled toothbrush with fluoride toothpaste."

Three separate pages, one specification. Small head, soft bristles — with the small head there so the brush can reach the back teeth and the gum line, and soft bristles because the technique that works is gentle rather than vigorous.

The technique the brush is for. "Gently brush teeth and along the gum line in small circles, making sure to brush each tooth on the front, back, and chewing surfaces." Small circles, not scrubbing; and the gum line is named as somewhere to clean rather than somewhere to avoid.

Where soft bristles earn their keep. The Department's erosion page explains why pressure is the risk rather than the brush itself: acid "can also soften the tooth surface, making it easier for it to be worn away by abrasion or teeth grinding". Its instruction for anyone in that position is to "brush your teeth gently, but thoroughly", and to wait "at least 30 minutes after the acid exposure before brushing your teeth". A hard brush on a softened surface removes tooth, not plaque.

Electric brushes. The Department treats them as a good option with a caution attached: "Guide the brush slowly across, pausing for a few seconds at each tooth. Do not press too hard or scrub, let the brush do the work." Its children's page describes them as "a good alternative for some children aged over three years".

What no brush reaches. "It is important to clean between teeth where a toothbrush can't reach." The Department puts the gap in concrete terms: if you skip flossing or an interdental brush, "up to a third of each tooth doesn't get cleaned". Which product to use is a question it hands to a clinician — "talk to your oral health professional about whether you should use one of these products" — because the right choice depends on how big the gaps between your teeth are.

Sources: Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Teeth and mouth care, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 25 July 2025); Toothbrushing - children 0-6 years, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 4 August 2026); Dental erosion, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 22 October 2025). All accessed 6 November 2026.

A new brush does not reset the routine

A replaced brush feels like a fresh start, and it is worth being clear about how little it changes on its own. The things that decide whether brushing works are when, how long, and what happens afterwards.

Twice a day, at stated times. "Clean your teeth twice a day; in the morning and before bed." The children's guidance repeats the same two slots: "Brush teeth twice a day - in the morning and before going to bed at night." The night one is doing the heavier work, because saliva flow drops during sleep and whatever is left on the teeth stays there.

How long. The Department's children's page gives a duration as a guide rather than a rule: brush "the teeth and along the gum line to clean every tooth thoroughly (about two minutes is a good guide)".

And then do not rinse. "After brushing, spit out the fluoride toothpaste - do not swallow it, and do not rinse with water. This allows the fluoride more time to strengthen your teeth." This is the step most often undone by habit, and a new brush does nothing to help it.

Who needs help with the brush, and until when. For children the Department is specific about supervision: "You will need to help your child brush their teeth until they can do it well enough by themselves (usually about eight years old)." Before that, "young children are not able to brush their own teeth well enough so they need an adult to do it for them", with a handover suggested "at around age two or three" where you "help them develop the skill by letting them have a go first before you follow up to make sure all surfaces have been cleaned".

What a brush is up against. The reason any of this matters is plaque, which the Department describes as the bacteria that "stick to your teeth in a soft build up". Regular brushing "helps to prevent tooth decay and gum disease by reducing the amount of bacteria and plaque around your teeth and gums". Brushing removes the build-up; it does not change what causes it, which is why the Department pairs it with diet advice rather than offering it alone.

And the limit of self-assessment. Whether your brushing is working is not something a mirror answers. "The early signs of dental disease can be difficult to see. An oral health professional is trained to spot and treat any problems early, which can prevent bigger problems developing." With one warning worth repeating: "Having no pain does not always mean that your teeth and mouth are healthy."

Sources: Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Teeth and mouth care, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 25 July 2025); Toothbrushing - children 0-6 years, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 4 August 2026); Tooth decay, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 28 June 2025). All accessed 6 November 2026.

Frequently asked questions

Should I replace my toothbrush after a cold or the flu?

It is a good idea. A toothbrush can hold germs after an illness, so replacing it once you have recovered helps avoid reintroducing them into your mouth. If you share a household, keep each person's brush separate.

Do electric toothbrush heads need replacing as often?

Generally yes. Electric brush heads wear in a similar way to manual toothbrushes, so replacing the head about every three to four months, or sooner if the bristles fray, is usually advised. Follow the maker's instructions for your brush.

Can a worn toothbrush damage my gums?

Bristles that are bent or frayed may not clean well and can feel rough on the gums. Pressing too hard can also cause irritation. If your gums are sore or bleed when you brush, please book an examination so we can check the cause.

How should I store my toothbrush?

Rinse it well after use and let it air dry standing upright, away from other brushes. Avoid sealed containers that keep the bristles damp, and avoid storing it close to a toilet.

How often should I see a dentist as well?

Review intervals depend on your individual oral health risks. Our team can recommend how often you should have a check-up and clean after we have examined you.

What kind of toothbrush should I buy?

The Victorian Department of Health gives the same specification on three separate pages: "a toothbrush with a small head and soft bristles". For children, "a toothbrush that is designed for children ... should have a small head and soft bristles", and in its erosion guidance it asks for "a soft-bristled toothbrush with fluoride toothpaste".

Are hard bristles better at removing plaque?

The published advice does not recommend them. The technique the Department describes is gentle — "gently brush teeth and along the gum line in small circles" — and on worn or acid-softened teeth it asks you to "brush your teeth gently, but thoroughly", because acid "can also soften the tooth surface, making it easier for it to be worn away by abrasion".

Should I brush right after an acidic drink?

No. The Department's instruction is to "wait at least 30 minutes after the acid exposure before brushing your teeth, to allow your saliva to neutralise the acid in your mouth".

How long should I brush for?

The Department's children's guidance offers "about two minutes is a good guide" for cleaning every tooth and the gum line thoroughly.

Does an electric brush need a different technique?

Less effort, not more. "Guide the brush slowly across, pausing for a few seconds at each tooth. Do not press too hard or scrub, let the brush do the work." For children, the Department describes an electric brush as "a good alternative for some children aged over three years".

At what age can a child brush their own teeth?

The Department puts the handover later than most people expect: "You will need to help your child brush their teeth until they can do it well enough by themselves (usually about eight years old)." It suggests starting to build the skill "at around age two or three", letting them try first and then following up "to make sure all surfaces have been cleaned".

Do I rinse after brushing?

No. "After brushing, spit out the fluoride toothpaste - do not swallow it, and do not rinse with water. This allows the fluoride more time to strengthen your teeth."

Will a new toothbrush clean between my teeth?

No brush does. "It is important to clean between teeth where a toothbrush can't reach." Without floss or an interdental brush, the Department says, "up to a third of each tooth doesn't get cleaned". Which product suits your gaps is something to "talk to your oral health professional about".

How do I know my brushing is working?

Not by how your teeth feel. "The early signs of dental disease can be difficult to see. An oral health professional is trained to spot and treat any problems early", and "having no pain does not always mean that your teeth and mouth are healthy".

Related services and further reading

Dental check-ups

Dental hygiene

How to brush your teeth the right way

Why clean between your teeth

Which toothpaste should you use?

How often do I need to see the dentist?

6 questions often asked of dentists

5 tips for a healthier smile

Core Dental at a glance

Nine Core Dental clinics across Melbourne: Southbank, South Melbourne, Caroline Springs, Carrum Downs, Epping, Wyndham, Berwick, Bayside and Glenferrie.

Open six days a week: Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm and Saturday mornings.

Interest-free payment plans and HICAPS on-site claiming.

Call 13 13 16 or book online.

Contact Core Dental

Phone	13 13 16
Booking	Online through coredental.com.au, or call 13 13 16
Hours	Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm, Saturday 8.00am to 1.30pm (Bayside 8.30am to 1.30pm), Sunday closed
Clinics	Southbank , South Melbourne , Caroline Springs , Carrum Downs , Epping , Wyndham , Berwick , Bayside , Glenferrie

Results, recovery times and potential risks vary for each individual. This information is general in nature and is intended for people over 18. Seek advice from a qualified, AHPRA-registered practitioner before proceeding.

How often should a toothbrush be replaced?

Core Dental suggests replacing your toothbrush about every three to four months, or sooner if the bristles fray or the brush looks worn or damaged. Electric toothbrush heads generally follow the same timing.

When should you replace a toothbrush early?

Our team at Core Dental recommends replacing a toothbrush early if the bristles are frayed or bent, if the brush is damaged, or after you have been sick. This helps avoid reintroducing germs and bacteria into your mouth.

Why does an old toothbrush matter for oral health?

A toothbrush removes plaque and microorganisms that can cause cavities and bad breath. Contamination builds with every use, so a worn brush may clean less effectively and can put germs back into your mouth.

Does a toothbrush stay clean after the first use?

No. Contamination can occur after the first use and increases with each later use. Core Dental suggests rinsing the brush well, air drying it upright and keeping it apart from other people's brushes.

How can I book a check-up at Core Dental?

Call Core Dental on 13 13 16 or book online through coredental.com.au. We have nine clinics across Melbourne and are open Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm and Saturday mornings.

What hours are Core Dental clinics open?

Core Dental clinics are open Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm and Saturday 8.00am to 1.30pm, with Bayside opening on Saturdays from 8.30am. Our clinics are closed on Sunday.

Who can advise me on brushing technique at Core Dental?

Our dentists and hygienists can review how you brush during a check-up or hygiene appointment and suggest a technique and toothbrush type that suit your teeth and gums.

What should I do for severe tooth pain or swelling?

Contact your dental practice promptly. At Core Dental we reserve emergency appointments where possible. For uncontrollable bleeding, trouble breathing or swallowing, or serious facial injury, call 000 immediately.