

**** FEATURE ARTICLE ****

March 18, 2008; Vol. 1, Issue #3

“The TRUTH about Toothpaste” by Vicky Flint, RDH

THE BOTTOM-LINE SCOOP: TOOTHPASTE IS NOT SOAP. There. Now you know. The truth is: you would do just fine without toothpaste at all. **You don't need it.**

What? We don't need it? That's right. Plaque (“biofilm”) is sticky. Think of peanut butter on a knife. Think about getting peanut butter off of a knife. You can rinse it in water, smear soap on it, blast it with high-pressure water, and swish it through an anti-peanut butter preparation – and still have peanut butter on that knife. These actions, of course, are analogous to rinsing your mouth out, smearing toothpaste across your teeth, using an oral irrigator, and using mouthwash.

The **most effective way** to remove sticky biofilm (and peanut butter) is to **scrape it off**. That is best accomplished with a toothbrush and floss (tooth brushing reaches about 70% of tooth surfaces).

Think back to how great your teeth felt as you were leaving my office – so smooth and “slick”. Run your tongue over your teeth right now. Do you feel some “rough” spots? That's plaque. About once a week or so, take your dry toothbrush (no toothpaste, no water) and brush along your gumlines in tiny, gentle circles. Check with your tongue again. Those “rough” spots usually go away. That means your toothbrush has reached the areas previously missed. Then put a small smear of toothpaste on your brush and brush your tongue with it. This is the best in-between professional cleaning spiff-up you can do.

So – Why do we have toothpaste? Why use it?

There are **3 primary reasons** to use toothpaste.

1 – **It tastes good**. Toothpaste has mint or some other flavoring that freshens breath and leaves a pleasant, fresh taste in our mouths. In fact, that pleasant, fresh taste can shut down sugar cravings. Sometime when you are craving sweets, go brush your teeth and tongue (with toothpaste). See if it works for you!

2 – Most toothpaste contains fluoride, and **topical fluoride treatments** help keep tooth enamel hard and cavity-resistant. (The fluoride in water controversy will be addressed in a future article.)

3 – Specialty toothpastes help **special needs**. Toothpaste for sensitive teeth is highly appreciated by people who have this issue. Whitening toothpastes help to control coffee and tea stains and may prolong the effects of professional whitening. Fairly new to the market are

