

# **HISTORY OF THE TOOTH BRUSH**

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The earliest known toothbrush dates back thousands of years. Known as a “chew stick”, this brush was made by chewing or mashing small twigs or tree roots until the fibers at one end became loose enough to form a rough brush. The cleaning surface had much the same effect as chewing the end of a toothpick. Some native Australian and African people living traditionally still clean their teeth with chew sticks.

Ancient Chinese, Romans, and Greeks were also avid oral hygiene enthusiasts.

Five thousand years ago, the Chinese thought dental decay was caused by white-colored dental worms with black heads that could be seen when a tooth was extracted. In those days, cures for toothache included purgatives, mouthwashes, massage, and pills. The pills, usually made of grated garlic and salt peter, were inserted into the ear opposite the side of the face affected by the dental pain.

The early Romans also had their own dental-care preferences. Pliny the Younger of Rome (61-113 A.D.) proclaimed that using a vulture quill as a toothpick would cause halitosis, but using a porcupine quill was acceptable because it “made the teeth firm.”

The Greeks, however, were much more modern. In the third century B.C., Aristotle advised Alexander the Great to rub his teeth every morning with “a thin linen towel, which is somewhat rough.” Using linen as a tooth cleaner is documented as late as 1602, when William Vaughan wrote in *Fifteen Directions to Preserve Health* that to keep teeth “white and uncorrupt [people should] wash the mouth after every meal, sleep with the mouth somewhat open and in the morning take a line cloth and rub the teeth well within and without.”

In fifteenth-century Europe, picking the teeth was widely accepted until philosophers began to issue conduct warnings. Rhodes said: “Pick not thy teeth with thy knyfe, but take a stick, or some clean thyng, then doe you not offend.”

It was actually the English in 1780 who gave the world the first modern toothbrush. The handle was made from bone and the bristles were wired into bored holes.

The toothbrush migrated to the United States, and in the 1880s, hand-cut and polished cattle thigh bones made excellent toothbrush handles while long-haired hog bristles were inserted by hand, one at a time into hand-drilled holes.

In the twentieth century, the humble toothbrush soared to new heights. Dr. Robert Hutson, a periodontist from San Jose, California, invented the first toothbrush with soft end-rounded nylon bristles. He named the product “Oral-B”. In 1969, the Oral-B® Classic™ toothbrush went to the moon...Neil Armstrong used one minute before his historical moon walk.