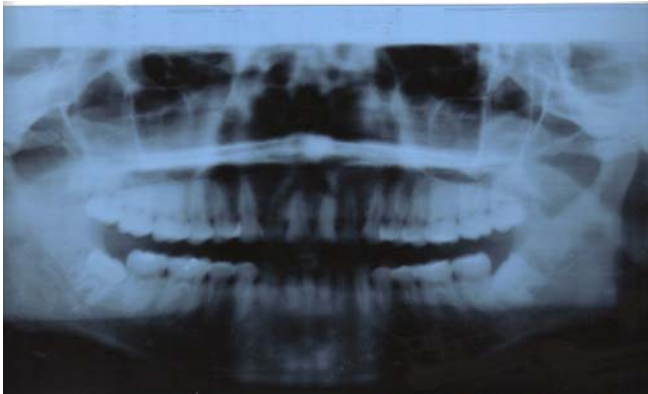


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Teeth Tales

By Paola Lizares



I love brushing my teeth! I didn't use to. Never will I forget the day the dentist said that I had eight cavities. Not one or two, but EIGHT. I was twelve years old then. Aside from having to face a furious mother (she had to pay the bill), I had to face the fact that, for the rest of my life, I was going to have silver-coloured fillings in my molars. Terrified by my mother, my dentist and the dentist's bills, I decided to take tooth care seriously. Since then, I brush my teeth after each meal, often even after small snacks. I know that I may sound obsessive to some people, but the truth is that every year my dentist congratulates me for having clean teeth and healthy gums, all thanks to two indispensable inventions: the toothbrush and toothpaste.

I personally couldn't live without a toothbrush and a tube of toothpaste. I get irritated the few times I forget to put my toothbrush and my toothpaste in my bag. Given how important these everyday objects are to me, I have decided to do some research on their history and share it with you. But before you continue reading, think about the following questions:

- 1) Which do you think is older, the toothbrush or toothpaste?
- 2) Where do you think the toothbrush was invented?
- 3) Where do you think toothpaste was invented?

Now read the following text and check if you were right.

The Egyptians were quite concerned about their dental hygiene. They rubbed little branches shaped like brushes against their teeth. The earliest

known reference to toothpaste dates back to a 4th-century Egyptian papyrus, which prescribes a mixture of salt, pepper, mint leaves and iris flowers to preserve the beauty of your teeth. The Romans weren't so herbal: they simply used human urine to take care of their teeth. Horrible though this may seem, the truth is that the ammonia of our urine probably had a whitening effect on our teeth.

In 1498, a Chinese emperor had boar bristles¹ fixed into a bone, thus inventing the first 'real' toothbrush we know of. Although it was brought to Europe by merchants, it didn't become common here until the Industrial Revolution, thanks to the first mass-produced toothbrush created by the Englishman William Addis in 1780. At first, toothbrushes were only used with water, but homemade powders with chalk and salt soon became popular. Needless to say, most of these homemade powders were aggressive and ineffective. Luckily, in 1896 in New York City, Colgate & Company manufactured a decent kind of toothpaste that was sold in a collapsible tube, similar to the tubes that had recently been introduced for artist's oil colours. Modern toothpaste was born.

Well into the 20th century, toothbrushes, although mass-produced, were still made of boar bristles. This had several disadvantages: boar bristles eventually would fall out of the handle after use, and they would dry up too slowly, thus retaining bacteria. However, in 1937, DuPont laboratories invented nylon. A year later, they started selling the first nylon bristle toothbrushes, which we still use today. At first, nylon bristles were painfully hard, but by 1950, DuPont developed softer bristles. In the fifties, laboratories started adding fluoride to toothpaste. The electric toothbrush was invented by Squibb Pharmaceutical in 1959.

So this is the history of the toothbrush and toothpaste, those everyday objects that everybody has – or should have. Were your answers to the three questions above correct?

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¹ Cerdas de jabalí