

A Natural Smile

Give shoppers something to smile about with natural oral care options.

By LAUREN TOM

When it comes to making healthy lifestyle choices, shoppers may think they're covering all their bases with a well-balanced diet and a great workout routine. But what about oral care? Conventional toothpaste may be doing more harm to their enamel than they realize. Natural oral care—from natural toothpastes and rinses to eco-friendly toothbrushes—is an important segment for shoppers to bite into.

Why Natural Toothpaste?

Ask shoppers to take a look at the ingredients listed in their toothpaste. There could be harsh abrasives, artificial flavoring agents and chemical detergents, which may make some shoppers want to move to a natural brand.

Conventional toothpastes may include propylene glycol, for instance, a solvent that is a working component in antifreeze (1). Some believe this ingredient might be safe for cosmetics like deodorants, but not products that can be ingested. Another infamous chemical found in some conventional toothpaste brands is triclosan. This controversial chemical has been shown in studies to alter normal hormonal processes, act as a thyroid toxin, trigger an increase in antibiotic resistance and aggravate allergies (2, 3). Also, artificial coloring is prevalent in conventional toothpastes.

Natural Ingredients Do Wonders

Several natural ingredients can be beneficial to teeth and play a role in optimal oral health. **Baking soda** (Sodium bicarbonate) acts as a gentle abrasive to clean the teeth and also neutralizes odor and acid. This ingredient is said to help dissolve stains and plaque on the teeth with regular brushing (4). **Silica** helps gently polish the teeth to clean and refresh. It provides toothpaste with a smooth, gel-like quality for removing plaque (4). Some natural toothpastes include **bamboo** powder, which functions like a gentle polish for whiter and brighter teeth (5). **Calcium** in natural toothpaste is said to help strengthen the tooth enamel and protect against demineralization. Toothpaste can contain **cranberries**, which are loaded with powerful antioxidants and support oral health (5). **Ginger** and **aloe** in toothpaste helps soothe irritation while deep cleaning both the teeth and gums without a harsh abrasive feeling (5).

Some natural toothpastes also include **papaya extract**, **oregano oil**, **birch tree extract**, **clove bud oil** and **wild sage** (6). These ingredients may help reduce dental plaque build up and also freshen the breath without using any toxic chemicals.

Also found in numerous oral care products is **xylitol**, a natural sugar alcohol that is about as sweet as sugar but *positively* affects

the teeth. Unlike sugar, xylitol prevents bacterial adhesion (and reduces the ability of bacteria to grow and spread), which has been found in studies to reduce tooth decay and cavities (7).

Studies have shown that xylitol contributes to long-lasting dental care with regular use, as the amount of acid-producing bacteria declines and the saliva becomes more alkaline. This also supports healthy tooth enamel (7, 8).

Other Tooth-Worthy Products

Other than natural toothpaste, there are some eco-friendly products that help oral health care. **Bamboo toothbrushes** not only can help our environment, but also are more resistant to bacteria than other materials. Some **natural dental flosses** contain ingredients like beeswax and jojoba wax, which are gentle on gums but strong enough to clean between teeth. **Xylitol gum** and **mints** can help support healthy teeth by preventing bacterial adhesion and supporting a healthy mouth pH. **Breath spray** that has no alcohol in it helps keep the mouth fresh without tongue and gum irritation. Eco-friendly **bamboo toothpicks** are a natural benefit because they are a softer and less dense wood, not harsh on the teeth and gums.

Look for new probiotic offerings for your supplements section, too, as certain probiotic fast-dissolve tablets are coming to market that help to freshen breath and support oral/throat health (9). **WF**

See www.wholefoodsmagazine.com/hbc for additional coverage of the HABA category.

References

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