

The Massachusetts Dental Society (MDS) is pleased to make this publication available to our member dentists as a way of communicating important oral health information to their patients.

Information in WORD OF MOUTH comes from dental health care professionals of the MDS and other leading professional dental organizations, including the American Dental Association. If you have any questions about specific content that may affect your oral health, please contact your dentist. For timely news regarding oral health, visit the Public section of the MDS Web site at [www.massdental.org](http://www.massdental.org).

Your comments and suggestions regarding WORD OF MOUTH are always welcome. All correspondence and requests for additional copies may be forwarded to Melissa Carman, Managing Editor of Publications and Web Site, Massachusetts Dental Society, Two Willow Street, Suite 200, Southborough, MA 01745-1027, or email [mcarman@massdental.org](mailto:mcarman@massdental.org).

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# Thinking About Going Green With Your Toothpaste?

Our society has become more and more health conscious—and that’s a good thing. Late last year, the New York City Board of Health voted to ban the use of artery-clogging artificial trans fats in restaurants in the city because of their unhealthy link to heart disease. Many cities in America are now “smoke-free,” which means that smoking is not allowed in public establishments. More and more people are buying organic foods, with 2006 sales expected to reach \$16 billion. And this “green” trend has extended to more than just food items. It’s not uncommon to walk down the health and beauty product aisle at your local supermarket and find products labeled “natural” and “organic,” including oral hygiene products such as toothpaste, mouthwash, and dental floss. But if you do decide to go “green” with your toothpaste purchase, could your teeth be missing out on the healthiest ingredient of all, fluoride?

Like their commercial counterparts, natural toothpastes come in many different flavors—you’ll find the usual mint-family varieties alongside some interesting flavors such as tea tree, lavender, fennel, calendula, and salt—but they don’t always come with fluoride. Many natural toothpaste manufacturers instead use other natural ingredients that serve the dual purpose of cleaning teeth and helping the environment. These ingredients include natural flavor sweeteners, minerals for whitening and fighting tartar, and tea tree oil and aloe vera gel for soothing



irritated gums and skin, presented in environmentally friendly recycled packaging. There are natural whitening toothpastes that use ingredients such as bamboo powder, calcium carbonate, silica, and even pineapple to brighten teeth. But not all of these natural toothpastes contain fluoride, which is the number-one ingredient you need to keep your teeth and gums as healthy as possible. And that’s where shopping for natural toothpaste can get tricky.

The American Dental Association recommends that all children over the age of 2 and adults brush their teeth twice daily using fluoride toothpaste that bears the ADA Seal of Approval. (For more information on fluoride and infants, see “The Right Formula for Your Baby’s



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The American Dental Association recommends that all children over the age of 2 and adults brush their teeth twice daily using fluoride toothpaste that bears the ADA Seal of Approval. (For more information on fluoride and infants, see “The Right Formula for Your Baby’s

Bottle,” on p. 5.) Fluoride is effective in preventing and reversing the early signs of tooth decay. It hardens the tooth’s outer enamel to make it more resistant to the cavity-causing acid that forms when the bacteria in plaque break down sugars and carbohydrates from the diet. Fluoride also acts to repair, or remineralize, areas in which acid attacks have already begun. The remineralization effect of fluoride is important because it reverses the early decay process as well as creating a tooth surface that is more resistant to decay.

If you choose to brush your teeth with a natural toothpaste, you want to make sure you select one that contains what your teeth need to protect them from cavities. Read the label to make sure fluoride is one of the first ingredients and brush away.

For more information on toothpastes or your oral health, please contact the Massachusetts Dental Society at (800) 342-8747 or visit us online at [www.massdental.org](http://www.massdental.org). 