Need holiday gift ideas? Oral hygiene products can make them smile

s the holidays approach, you may be searching for a gift for a child, teacher, friend or family member. Why not give something that will help them keep their teeth and gums healthy in the coming year?

For example, consider giving a child a bucket filled with a few child-sized toothbrushes and tubes of children's toothpaste. A cartoon-character towel and small bars of soap will encourage them to make that trip to the bathroom each night to care for their teeth when they wash up.

Adults, especially those who like to travel, will make good use of a gift bag filled with travel-sized tubes of toothpaste, extra toothbrushes and dental floss.

You might entice a teen to do a better job of cleaning his or her teeth in the coming year with a powered toothbrush and some plaque-disclosing tablets. Disclosing tablets, sold over the counter, are used after brushing and flossing. They produce a red stain that clings to plaque, a thin film of bacteria that forms constantly on the teeth and gums. (Plaque that is not removed regularly can harden into rough porous deposits called calculus, or tartar. Once the hardened tartar forms, it can be removed only when the teeth are cleaned in the dental office.) The disclosing tablet's red stain, which is brushed away easily, is produced by harmless food coloring and indicates where plaque was not removed entirely.

LOOK FOR THE ADA SEAL OF ACCEPTANCE

Grocery stores and pharmacies offer a seemingly endless supply of oral hygiene products and brands. Look for those that have the American Dental Association's Seal of Acceptance. The Seal is an assurance that the product has met the ADA's criteria for safety and effectiveness. Packaging and labeling for products awarded the Seal have been reviewed by the ADA for accuracy and present true and accurate information. Here are a few gift-giving categories to consider: **Toothpastes.** Toothpastes awarded the ADA Seal of Acceptance contain fluoride to help prevent tooth decay. Toothpaste is available in pumps and tubes and as a gel or paste. You can buy toothpaste with special ingredients for controlling plaque and gingivitis, tartar or sensitivity or for whitening teeth.

Toothbrushes. Manual toothbrushes should be replaced every three to four months, or sooner if the bristles become frayed. People with impaired motor skills may find a powered toothbrush helpful.

Dental floss. Dental floss helps remove plaque and debris that collect between the teeth and under the gumline. Waxed and unwaxed dental floss both are effective. Those who have tightly spaced teeth may find waxed floss easier to use.

Interdental cleaning aids. Interdental cleaning aids are another way to remove plaque from between the teeth. These products include special picks or sticks to get between and around teeth. People who have trouble handling dental floss may find it easier to use interdental cleaners.

Oral irrigators. Oral irrigators direct a stream of water to remove particles of food from around and between the teeth. They may be helpful to people with braces or fixed partial dentures. They are useful for cleaning hard-to-reach areas and may help reduce gingivitis. Using an oral irrigator is not a substitute for daily brushing and flossing.

Mouthrinses. Mouthrinses can be cosmetic or therapeutic. Cosmetic mouthrinses may freshen breath or "sweeten" the mouth temporarily. Although they can aid in removing food particles, their primary purpose is to mask mouth odor. Nonprescription therapeutic mouthrinses include those that have fluoride for decay prevention or active ingredients to help reduce plaque and gingivitis, the early stage of gum disease.

For more information about products with the American Dental Association's Seal of Acceptance, visit "www.ada.org/ada/seal/index.asp".

1799

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