

THE PARADE OF MOUTH RINSES: SWISHING OFF THE CLAIMS

BY DR. SUSAN MAPLES

So, you bought mouthwash that claimed to freshen breath, kill germs, prevent cavities, whiten teeth and give them that just-polished feel. Sounds like a dream come true, doesn't it? Well, like most dreams, some of it is grounded in reality and the rest is fantasy.

It's true that rinsing your mouth, even with plain water, causes the plaque to absorb water and swell. That makes it easier to remove the plaque with a brush and floss. But the teeth and mucosa (gums and wet skin) absorb this chemical storm also. Picture teeth as a bundle of microscopic glass straws that suck up the surrounding liquid, and the mucosa as a sponge that absorbs some of product into your body. So, if you're buying a commercial or prescription rinse, be discriminating.

Let's face it, most people buy a mouthwash to cover bad breath. The results are short-lived because none of the commercial rinses address the underlying cause of continual bad breath. For persistent odor problems consult your dentist to look for signs of gum disease (rotting flesh smell), cavities (rotting tooth smell), food impaction (rotting food smell), smoking-related gum disease (rotting smell) or other oral infections such as candida. For the just-after-a-meal breath freshener, my patients are enjoying peppermint beadlets, a small burst of medical-grade essential oil that lasts longer and contains no chemicals.

For germ-killing rinses, we turn mostly to an ingredient called chlorhexidine, which can be

prescribed by your dentist and only for therapeutic short-term use. Fortunately, a safer long-term antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory rinse, with a combination of medical grade oils, is now available.

Be wary of rinses that claim to lighten — they don't. Be even more wary of rinses that claim to take the place of brushing. These add detergents or surfactants that make your teeth feel slippery instead of fuzzy, but they don't remove plaque!

And, if you suffer from tooth decay, a disease called caries, you can benefit from therapeutic levels of fluoride, a higher level than is allowed in the over-the-counter rinses. Aside from prescribing a rinse, your dentist can help you with a plan to turn this terrible disease on its head. Remember, we don't solve tooth decay with a drill and fill — we must unravel all causative factors like sugar consumption, dry mouth, acid reflux, acidic drinks, foods and plaque control.

If you settle on any rinse other than water for long-term use, please avoid those containing alcohol. Alcohol is considered a co-carcinogen, meaning it acts synergistically with other cancer promoters like HPV (human papilloma virus) and tobacco. ■



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For more on mouth rinses, toothpastes, brushes, flossing aids and ALL oral-systemic health connections, read Dr. Susan's book:



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Blabber Mouth!

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