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Pearly Wisdom

By MARTHA SCHINDLER CONNORS

STICK WITH SOFT BRISTLES Hard bristles damage teeth and gums unless they're used very carefully. Dentists universally recommend using a soft-bristle brush, said Dr. Howard S. Glazer, a former president of the Academy of General [Dentistry](#), an organization devoted to advocacy and continuing education.

So who buys hard brushes?

"Probably some macho guy," Dr. Glazer said.

SCRUB SOFTLY "Plaque is pretty soft, so if you get the brush in the right place and gently clean in that area, you'll get it off," said Dr. Susan Karabin, a periodontist in Manhattan and the president of the American Academy of Periodontology. "Scrubbing back and forth is definitely not required."

Instead, place the brush at a 45-degree angle against the gums, then move it gently in short strokes.

QUICK AND DIRTY IS NOT THE WAY People who brush only the chewing surfaces of their teeth, and the front, are missing the places where disease-causing plaque likes to hide: the inside surfaces, the back teeth and the gum line.

"Just going through the motions of brushing doesn't cut it," Dr. Karabin said. "You've got to do it right."

BEWARE OF BLOOD Leaving plaque along the gumline leaves gums swollen and inflamed and apt to bleed. Left untreated, [bleeding gums](#) can lead to tooth loss and painful surgery.

If you see red, see a dentist; it may be a sign of inferior brushing.

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