

Minty fresh breath and emotional well-being

Toothpastes have moved well beyond just cleaning your teeth

By Judy Hevrdjs

CHICAGO TRIBUNE

You have something like 32 teeth in your mouth, give or take a few wisdom teeth.

If you were so inclined, you could brush each tooth with a different paste thanks to a culture that celebrates individualism and manufacturers happy to be part of that celebration.

"If you think about what consumers are used to seeing — more targeted products — it would only make sense, then, that the oral-care category and the toothpaste category would follow suit," said Kim Feil, division president for worldwide innovation at Information Resources Inc., a Chicago-based market researcher. "America is spoiled by variety."

Last year, we spent more than \$1.25 billion on toothpastes that do "all these different things," according to IRI figures. At least a dozen players, from Colgate and Crest on through Aquafresh, Peppodent, Arm & Hammer and Sensodyne, offer variations on the paste-plus-fluoride theme, promising to tackle cavities, plaque (and tartar), its tough-to-remove sibling), gingivitis, bad breath and dull color.

"To maintain growth, companies need to do something to differentiate their brands from other brands," said Thomas O'Guinn, a professor of sociology and advertising at the Uni-

versity of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

"The tone of that right now is shifting into this aromatherapy and emotional-health space," Feil said.

She could have been talking about two newcomers: Crest's vanilla-cinnamon-mint flavored Rejuvenating Effects or Colgate's Herbal White Toothpaste scented with mint, lemon, eucalyptus and melissa (or balm mint extract).

pers and need toothpaste for their entire lives.

"Over the 20th century, since about the '20s and '30s, we've trained consumers to expect more and more attributes and specialization in products," O'Guinn said. "Putting in additives really exploded in the 1950s, '60s, '70s."

But which one, Doctor?

Still the question remains, which is the right one for you?

"The tone ... right now is shifting into this aromatherapy and emotional-health space."

Kim Feil, market researcher, on the new frontier in toothpastes

The history of toothpaste

Things weren't always so confusing. Since B.C. days, people have been using pastes made from powdered ginger and mask, charcoal or the ashes of animal bones to clean and polish their teeth. Soap was long part of the formulation. And until 1892, dentifrice often came in porcelain jars. It was then, according to dental history, that Connecticut dentist Washington Wentworth Sheffield put toothpaste into a collapsible metal tube.

In fact, it wasn't until after World War II that people realized they could keep their Mother Nature-provided chop-

"Basically, all toothpastes will start off doing virtually the same things. ... All toothpastes are tooth cleaners. They contain mild detergents. They contain mild abrasives. They also contain flavoring. They contain coloring. And they contain humectants so the paste or gel won't harden when you take the top off.

"You know what I tell my patients?" Dr. Tracia Drummond, a Chicago dentist, said. "I tell my patients, fluoride because fluoride has value. It reduces the potential for decay. Other than that, (toothpaste) is merely a vehicle to make brushing more pleasant. It's really

the physical act of brushing your teeth" that cleans them.

He suggested consumers look for the American Dental Association seal. "Any product that has earned the ADA seal means it has been tested and that the product will do what it says and says what it does."

According to Dr. Richard Price, a spokesman for the ADA, when you see a tube of toothpaste with the ADA seal, 99.9 percent of the time it is because of the fluoride in it.

"The ADA seal on toothpaste is for the therapeutic value — not the cosmetic value — the medicine part of it," he said. "What differentiates tooth soap, let's say, from tooth medicine is the fluoride ingredient."

Then things tend to get specialized, he said. Those prone to tartar buildup might look for those containing anti-tartar ingredients.

"The baking soda in the toothpaste really is a flavoring agent, a kind of salty taste," he said. "The peroxide that's in it is more of a marketing ingredient — it's half of 1 percent peroxide, which has no therapeutic value at that level, but it foams, and we have been brought up to think foaming is good."

As for all the other things, Price said: "If the public wants it, the manufacturers will come out with it if they don't create the need in the first place."