

Guest Editorial

The dentifrice deception revisited

Theodore P. Croll* / Norman Tinanoff**

In 1985, Simonsen¹ wrote about deceptive toothpaste advertisements. Such advertisements characteristically show toothbrushes covered with large quantities of toothpaste (Fig 1, top) and are apparently designed to convince the observer that the immense volume of dentifrice is the proper amount to use. Dentists and dental hygienists know that the toothbrush bristles and dental floss are primarily responsible for the physical disruption of dental plaque from tooth surfaces, while the dentifrice adds mild abrasives and surfactants. The chief role of the dentifrice is to provide fluoride for the topical effect and flavor to make brushing pleasant.

The problem when children use large quantities of dentifrice is that 1 inch of fluoridated toothpaste squeezed from a tube or pump is approximately 1.5 g of dentifrice, containing about 1.5 mg of fluoride, which most children under the age of 5 years swallow instead of spitting out. It is conceivable that a child who brushes (or is brushed) twice daily with excessive amounts of toothpaste may receive 3 mg of fluoride systemically. This fluoride burden is added to that

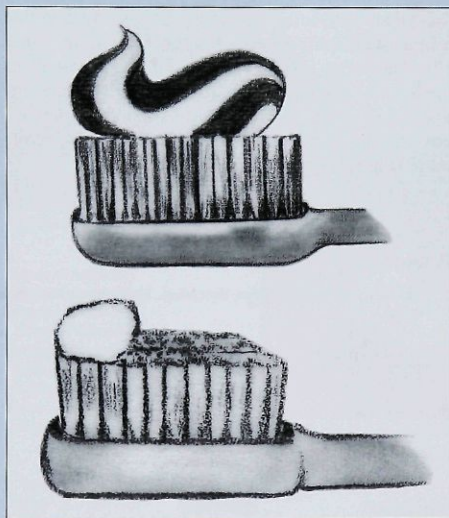


Fig 1 (top) Toothpaste advertisements characteristically picture excessive quantities of dentifrice. (bottom) A correct portion for brushing.

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received from optimally fluoridated water, fluoride supplements, and fluoride in the food chain. In addition, children who use toothpaste more than twice a day can consume even more fluoride. How many puzzling cases of fluorosis are the result of systemic overfluoridation related to dentifrice consumption in a child's first decade of life?

It is disturbing that toothpaste advertisements picturing a toothbrush laden with dentifrice have been permitted to promote overuse of toothpaste. Dentifrice

manufacturers claim that "artistic license" is necessary to represent their products more effectively and attractively. In addition, the dentifrices are produced with colorful stripes, enticing colors, "sparkles," child-pleasing packaging, and candylike flavors, all of which encourage children to consume toothpaste as a bathroom snack.

As suggested by Simonsen,¹ it is more likely that such deceptive and potentially harmful advertisements are designed not for their esthetic appeal, but to indoctrinate the public to use large quantities of dentifrice so that more can be sold. It is long past due that regulatory bodies such as the Food and Drug Administration and the American Dental Association (ADA) demand that toothpaste manufacturers advertise honestly and ethically. The ADA should also consider withdrawing its approval of dentifrices that are advertised with deceptive intent, and professional journals should permit only advertisements that show pea-sized portions of toothpaste (Fig 1, bottom).

References

- 1. Simonsen RJ: The dentifrice deception. *Quintessence Int* 1985; 16:659. □

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