Dear Dr. Brown:

Dentists routinely recommend postmeal toothbrushing and flossing, but members of the public often ignore their advice. Most patrons, for example, routinely exit restaurants nonchalant about food remnants in their mouths, and in one study only 28 percent of schoolchildren brushed their teeth after meals. To partly remedy this situation, I submit for discussion a supplemental oral hygiene practice.

In some cultures, people habitually rinse their mouths after meals. Some fastidious individuals even swipe a finger inside the oral pockets to scrub all accessible surfaces of their teeth and gums. By friction and dilution, such brushless postmeal toothwash (PT) should reduce intraoral food residue and, thus, food-related tooth staining, transient halitosis, and tongue coating. Reduction of intraoral proteolytic bacteria should hinder the synthesis of malodorous volatile-sulfur-compounds and thus chronic halitosis. Finally, PT may also limit caries by diminishing the amount of sucrose available for fermentation and by lowering the concentration of intraoral mutans streptococci.

Since PT requires no proprietary mouthwash, antibacterials, or chemicals, it poses no risk of generating bacterial drug resistance, allergy, or side effects. Although PT may initially appear aesthetically different, the public may adopt it because of its simplicity, speed, innocuousness, independence from implements, and cost-free nature. Sometimes people cannot brush their teeth after meals due to lack of a handy toothbrush, and sometimes they do not do so because of laziness. PT, although suboptimal, may be better than nothing and deserves further evaluation via controlled studies.

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REFERENCES