History of the tongue scraper

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Abstract

A tongue cleaner (tongue scraper, tongue brush) is an oral hygiene tool to keep the tongue's surface clean.

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A tongue cleaner (tongue scraper, tongue brush) is an oral hygiene tool to keep the tongue's surface clean. In healthy individuals, the tongue is self-cleaning. Several diseases may lead to painful tongue inflammation and plaque accumulation on its surface, leading to the loss of natural colour, shine, and the accumulation of pathogenic microorganisms. Plaque accumulation could be due to caries, gingivitis, periodontitis, or inflammation of the structures of the tongue and is the result of the microorganisms that grow from the byproducts of decomposing food or tissue, accompanied by foul odor. The appearance of the plaque varies with lower salivary flow or as a symptom of a systemic condition (gastric or intestinal diseases). A tongue scraper is used to remove the plaque, reduce the source of the foul odor, and thus help restore the normal oral microflora.

U-shaped tongue scrapers made of gold, silver, copper, tin, lead, iron, brass, thin, flexible pieces of wood, ivory, mother-of-pearl, whalebone, or tortoiseshell were known to Ancient Indians (1). Described in the Charaka Samhita (circa 1500 - 800 BCE), numerous oral hygiene tools, including sticks for brushing teeth and tongue scrapers, were included in this ancient Sanskrit work. Ancient Indians considered cleaning the oral cavity part of healthy digestion and daily hygiene. The scraping, containing toxic substances, was called *AMA*. Following scraping, one was rinsed with a solution of lime and turmeric, an antibacterial agent. It was essential to keep the tongue clean, thus.

1. avoid unwanted toxins,
2. keep pathogenic microorganisms (e.g., fungi) from the digestive system

3. improve digestion

4. improve one's sense of taste

5. freshen one's breath

6. keep the tongue clean to ensure it can be used for the diagnosis of diseases by practitioners of Ayurvedic medicine

The Romans also used tongue scrapers. Between the 15th and 19th centuries, tongue cleaning was mainly limited to the upper class. Large-scale demand for personal oral hygiene tools only started in the late 18 and early 19th centuries.

The first patent was issued in 1877 to Lazarus Morgenthau of New York (2). The design was a flexible blade that could be folded into a U shape and held with two hands to scrape the tongue's surface. In the next 130 years, over 135 patents for tongue cleaners were issued in the US alone. Their design did not vary considerably.

Toothbrushes were considered ineffective for tongue cleaning, although modern toothbrush designs now have protrusions on their heads that act as tongue cleaners. Ergonomic tongue cleaners are designed according to the anatomy of the tongue, optimized to clean plaque coating, and effectively clean the tongue's surface.

References:
1. Shklar G. and Chernin D. *A Sourcebook of Dental Medicine*, Maro Publications, p.46, 2001.
2. Morgenthau L. Tongue Scraper Patent # 194364, Aug 30, 1877.

1.Figure. Copper, U-shaped Indian tongue scraper