



Brushing Teeth on Shabbat

1. Many poskim permit brushing one's teeth on Shabbat, while some forbid doing so. Some poskim hold that if one does brush his teeth on Shabbat, he should use liquid toothpaste. See note for details.¹
2. It is permitted to use mouthwash on Shabbat.²

1. Memarei'ach: The Gemara (146a) states that if one smears wax in order to seal a barrel, he violates Memarei'ach, which the Rambam (Shabbat 11:6) explains is a Toldah of Memachaik (smoothing hides).

Rav Soloveitchik (quoted in Nefesh HaRav p. 168-9) held that Memarei'ach applies only if one smears a substance onto something else and it forms a new layer; however, the toothpaste dissolves within minutes and thus does not pose an issue of Memarei'ach.

Rav Ovadia Yosef (Yabia Omer 4:27) agrees. He supports this position from the Magen Avraham (316:24), who writes that Memarei'ach applies only if one wants to smooth one substance onto another, but not if one merely smears saliva on the ground in order for it to be absorbed. The Tzitz Eliezer 7:30:8 rejects this proof, because smoothing out the saliva doesn't accomplish anything, but smoothing the toothpaste does serve to clean one's teeth.

Rav Ovadia adds that perhaps it is similar to the Rambam (Responsa 339), who permitted using soap on Shabbat and was not concerned with Memarei'ach. Yet Mishna Brurah 326:30 quotes the Tiferet Yisrael, who thinks that there also is a prohibition of Memarei'ach in using soap on Shabbat.

Rav Moshe Feinstein (Igrot Moshe 1:112) writes that using toothpaste is a violation of Memachaik. Rabbi Aryeh Lebowitz ("Brushing Teeth on Shabbos") points out that most likely Rav Moshe meant Memarei'ach, as there is no scraping or sanding done to the teeth that would constitute Memachaik. Minchat Yitzchak 3:48 agrees.

Ohr Letzion (v. 2, 35:6) writes that Memarei'ach can be avoided using liquid toothpaste. While this seems to be the opinion of Shemirat Shabbat KeHilchata (ch. 14 n. 49 and 102), it is disputed by Tzitz Eliezer (*ibid.*) who argues that Memarei'ach can even apply to liquids.

Molid: The Gemara (Shabbat 51b) states that one may not crush ice in order to produce water on Shabbat. Rashi (s.v. Kedei) explains that it is rabbinically forbidden because the "creating" water is similar to a melacha. The Rashba (s.v. VeLi) however, argues that the prohibition is because it is similar to squeezing fruits.

The Rama 326:10 rules that it is forbidden to use soap on Shabbat because of Molid. Ginat Veradim 3:14 argues that not only according to the Rashba is it permitted, but even according to Rashi there's no Molid, since the soap is nullified by the water and there isn't any noticeable new formation. Yabia Omer 4:28 applies this logic to toothpaste. Menuchat Ahava (v. 2, p. 119) suggests that Molid may not

apply in this case where the transformation isn't visible since it happens in one's mouth.

Rabbi Hershel Schachter (quoted by Rabbi Aryeh Lebowitz) says that there is an issue of Molid only when changing a solid into a liquid or visa versa, but not if one is changing a quasi-solid paste to a quasi-liquid foam. Ketzot HaShulchan (v. 7 p. 99) agrees.

Refuah: Rav Ovadia Yosef (4:29:16) explains that there is no concern of Refuah, since brushing one's teeth does not heal or remove pain but rather prevents cavities and illnesses. He maintains that this is permitted not only according to the Beit Yosef 328:37, who permits a healthy person to take medicine, but even according to the Magen Avraham 328:43, who rejects the Beit Yosef's position, because brushing teeth is not clearly a medicinal activity. Ketzot HaShulchan (*ibid.*) and Ohr Letzion (*ibid.*) agree.

Sechitah: Rav Moshe Feinstein (*ibid.*) writes that it is preferable not to wet the brush to avoid the Melacha of Sechitah, wringing out a liquid from a solid. Rav Hershel Schachter (oral communication) holds that squeezing out hair is only d'rabanana since it appears like it absorbs liquid; bristles, however, are stiff and clearly don't look like they absorb liquid. Seridei Eish 1:30, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (quoted in Seridei Eish), and Rav Ovadia agree.

Uvda DeChol: Ketzot HaShulchan (*ibid.*) writes that using a toothbrush is considered Uvda DeChol. Rav Hershel Schachter (quoted by Rabbi Aryeh Lebowitz), however, holds that there is no issue of Uvda DeChol. Rav Ovadia 4:30 says that it may be a tzorech Shabbat, in which case Uvda DeChol does not apply.

Hachanah: Rav Moshe writes that one should not clean off the brush after using it because there's no use for it until after Shabbat. Yabia Omer 4:30 agrees. Rav Hershel Schachter (*ibid.*), though, permits cleaning the brush since people generally do so after brushing because it is unappealing to leave a dirty toothbrush lying around.

Chavalah: Minchat Yitzchak 3:48 writes that since it is hard to be careful not to make oneself bleed, one should not brush so as not to violate Chavalah. Rav Ovadia 4:29 writes that this is an issue only for someone who rarely brushes and almost certainly will bleed; otherwise, it is considered a *davar she'eino mitkavein* and is permitted.

2. Seemingly none of the above issues apply to using mouthwash on Shabbat. Be'er Moshe 1:34:7 permits using mouthwash, as he maintains that Molid Rei'ach does not apply to a person's body. Rivevot Efraim 2:115:23 agrees.