

# JOURNEYS OF TOOTHBRUSHES

## *Brushes with fame*

compiled by Bertha Vanatian, *Improbable Research staff*

Of the many toothbrushes that have traveled to dark places, several later found their way into the medical literature. Here are a few of those several.

### The Journey of One Toothbrush (1927)

“The Swallowing of a Full-Sized Toothbrush: Report of a Case from the Los Angeles General Hospital,” C.A. Johnson, *California and Western Medicine*, vol. 26, no. 2, 1927, pp. 210. The author reports:

The patient gave a history of having swallowed a toothbrush a few hours before, stating that while he was scrubbing his “tonsils” with the toothbrush, it slipped from his grasp and was swallowed. According to the patient, “several doctors attempted to remove this foreign body but were unable to do so.” ...

The patient’s right leg had been amputated just above the knee, and the fourth and fifth fingers of the left hand were also missing, which, together with the type of patient, led me to suspect that possibly the act had wilfully been committed in order to secure hospitalization, or that he had not even swallowed a toothbrush....

On June 21 operation was performed... after opening the peritoneum and packing off the intestine, the stomach was brought up and the handle of the toothbrush was readily palpable, with the bristle end fast in the pylorus.

### The Journeys of Four Toothbrushes (1988)

“Toothbrush Swallowing,” Allan D. Kirk, Bert A. Bowers, Joseph A. Moylan, and William C. Meyers, *Archives of Surgery*, vol. 123, 1988, pp. 382–4. The authors, at Duke University Medical Center, Durham, North Carolina, report:

We encountered four cases of toothbrush swallowing and reviewed the literature on this subject....

Case 4.—A 19-year-old female university student was admitted via the emergency room after a weekend outing to the beach. She had become nauseated after heavy alcohol consumption and tried to induce vomiting by stimulating her posterior pharynx with a toothbrush. The toothbrush was swallowed accidentally....

A total of 31 toothbrushes within the gastrointestinal tract have been reported. None have passed spontaneously.

### The Journey of Another Toothbrush (2010)

“Inadvertent Swallowing of Toothbrush,” Dinesh Lal, *New Zealand Medical Journal*, vol. 123, no. 1321, 2010, pp. 69–70.

A 15-year-old physically and mentally healthy Caucasian female presented to Middlemore Hospital’s Emergency Department (Auckland, New Zealand) after swallowing a standard 19cm toothbrush. She was running up some steps with the toothbrush in her mouth when she suddenly tripped and fell, pushing most of the toothbrush into her oesophagus.... On arrival in Emergency Department she was well, apart from describing a sensation of the toothbrush churning around in her stomach.

#### THE SWALLOWING OF A FULL-SIZED TOOTHBRUSH

REPORT OF A CASE FROM THE LOS ANGELES GENERAL HOSPITAL

By CLARENCE A. JOHNSON \*

This case is reported because of the unusual accident. On June 14, 1926, Mr. A. F., 49 years, entered the Los Angeles General Hospital with a letter from a police surgeon relating that “the bearer swallowed a toothbrush, and being unable to obtain the proper equipment for its removal, I am sending the man to you.”

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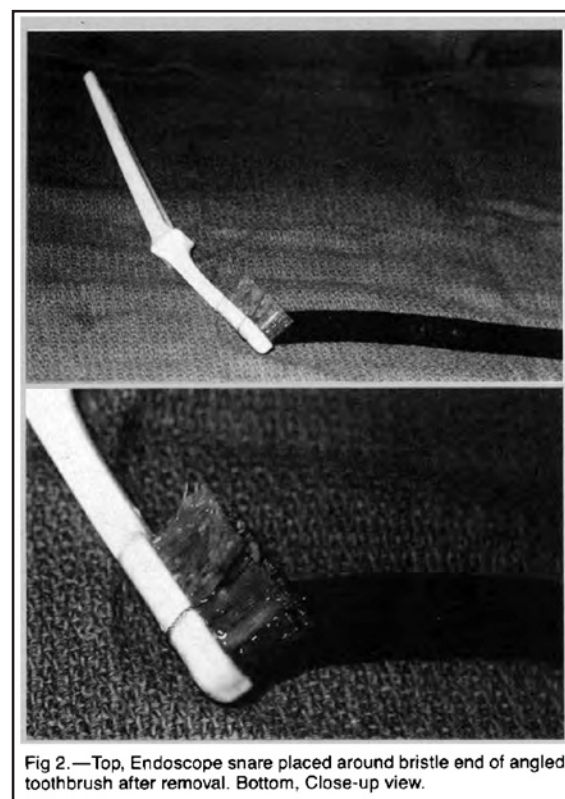


Fig 2.—Top, Endoscope snare placed around bristle end of angled toothbrush after removal. Bottom, Close-up view.

*Detail from the study “Toothbrush Swallowing.”*