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 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 willfully 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)

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)

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.