



One Size Does

Criteria for Selecting the Appropriate Handpiece

Not Fit All!

Tricia Osuna, RDH, BS*

Beyond sound clinical training, using the best instrumentation available is a key factor in delivering exceptional patient care. This is certainly the case when selecting the appropriate hygiene handpiece. Too often, this process is determined by what was learned in school, what is readily available in the office, or what a previous clinician might have used. This passive approach to handpiece selection may result in suboptimal patient care as well as failure of the clinician to benefit from the product features available today. The following article provides essential criteria to be considered when selecting handpieces.

Design for Use

Despite the fact that handpieces specially designed for prophy polishing have been on the market for more than a decade, hygienists continue to use low-speed handpieces designed for general dental procedures. While this is functional and often economical, using the dentist's "hand-me-down" low speed tool likely means using a handpiece that is larger, heavier, noisier, and more difficult to handle than a handpiece designed specifically for polishing. Also, there are only a few handpieces on the market that can be used with both disposable and autoclavable prophy angles.

Construction

The overall quality of a handpiece depends greatly on where the handpiece is manufactured and which materials are used in the manufacturing process. The first handpieces designed for the hygienist were, and continue to be, manufactured in the US. Over the years, handpieces of inferior construction and questionable origin have appeared on the market, claiming to be as good as the market leaders. It

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is important to know where a handpiece is made, of what material is it made, and most importantly, the length of the warranty. The top quality handpieces are made from medical grade stainless steel and offer warranties for as long as two years.

Performance and Ergonomics

Not all hygiene handpieces perform equally. Some handpieces feature basic performance characteristics, running at a single speed in a single direction, and are designed with little consideration to the user's comfort. The best handpieces on the market allow the hygienist to adjust the output speed relative to specific foot pedal pressure, vary the direction of the handpiece's rotation, and are designed to be balanced in the hygienist's hand. After weeks, months, and years of use, a poorly designed handpiece can take a toll on the hands, wrists, and spine. Therefore, it is essential to use a handpiece

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that fits comfortably in the hand, is adjustable to the patient's specific needs, and will not cause the hygienist to tire at the end of the day. In addition, depending on particular needs, it is advisable to partner with a manufacturer who offers a selection in hygiene handpieces. Remember, one size does not fit all.

Maintenance

A handpiece should be considered an investment; it is important to protect this investment by maintaining it in top condition. As mentioned, the

Table. Considerations for Handpiece Selection

- What is the length of the warranty?
- Where is the handpiece made?
- Can all types of angles or cups be used with the handpiece?
- Is the handpiece “lube-free?”
- Does the handpiece fit well in my hand?
- Can the speed and direction on the handpiece be controlled independently of the foot pedal?
- Does the handpiece have a swivel head and is it available with a quick disconnect?
- Is this handpiece specially designed for a hygienist?

length of the warranty provides a good indication of how long a handpiece will last. Also, the best performing handpieces on the market are now “lube-free,” meaning that the time and hassle traditionally associated with maintaining handpieces have been eliminated.

Conclusion

Your patients expect the best; hygienists should also demand the best from their handpiece. A good rule of thumb is to conduct research, ask the right questions, and purchase a handpiece that best suits individual needs. □

**Clinician, educator, author, and owner of Professional Insights, Inc, that provides market evaluations and market research, product evaluations, and consulting services; editorial board member, Journal of Practical Hygiene. She may be contacted at osunardh@aol.com.*