

TOOTHBRUSH AND METHOD FOR ITS MANUFACTURE

The invention relates to a toothbrush with a brush head and plastic bristles, optionally combined into bundles, fixed thereto, whereof at least some bristles have a profile on their circumferential surface, as well as a method for the manufacture of a bristle for a toothbrush. In the same way the invention is usable for an interdental cleaner, which is expressly included.

In the case of toothbrushes, either manually or electrically operated, the bristles conventionally comprise extruded monofilaments with a circular cross-section. Other cross-sectional have already been proposed. The cleaning action of such toothbrushes, as well as a desired massaging action of the gums, takes place almost exclusively through the bristle ends which are rounded to avoid gum recession and injury. To this extent the bristle end has to fulfil two opposing requirements, namely on the one hand exerting an adequate brushing action on the tooth and on the other bringing about a restrained massaging of the gums. The cleaning of the tooth surfaces and gaps between the teeth which is vital is consequently inadequate due to the compromises made.

Numerous attempts have been made to incorporate the circumferential surface of the bristle by profiling into the brushing process and consequently increase the cleaning action. Thus, it is known (DE 31 16 189) to provide the bristle with different, spaced thickenings, which form further brushing edges. It is scarcely possible to rationally manufacture such a brush, if it is borne in mind that bristles are conventionally produced by spinning or extruding. Admittedly it is theoretically possible to bring about cross-sectional changes in the extrusion direction enabling such a bristle to be produced by extrusion. The monofilaments produced by extrusion must be subsequently finished and namely stretched and heat stabilized, to give the bristle the desired bendability and the necessary re-righting capacity. Such stretching in the case of injection moulded or extruded bristles with spaced thickenings would only lead to the bristle being stretched and constricted in the vicinity of the narrowest cross-sections between the thickenings, whereas the latter would be uninfluenced. Such a bristle would be completely unusable. Even if it proved possible to provide such a bristle with the necessary characteristics, the danger would exist of the bristle with the thickenings jamming in the interdental spaces and on pulling either tearing off or tearing out at the bristle head or injuring the gums in the interdental space, where they are particularly

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endangered due to inadequate dental neck adhesion.

The problem of the invention is to propose a toothbrush with profiled bristles, which in the case of unchanged strength characteristics of the bristles, has an increased cleaning and massaging action and which can be inexpensively manufactured.

According to the invention this problem is solved in that the bristles have as a profile a helix.

Such a bristle can be produced by extrusion and finished in the same way as a conventional bristle. It has the advantage that in addition to the bristle end the head of the helix or its transition to the flanks and the actual flanks form additional brushing edges, which reinforce the cleaning action on the tooth surfaces and gaps between the teeth, without endangering the gums. Even if such a bristle penetrates the interdental gaps, no bristle jamming can occur, because there are no radial constrictions. In addition, on pulling the said helix can twist, so that no extraction forces act on the bristle which would be higher than those of conventional bristles. Even if the circumferential surface of such a bristle rubs over the gums, it has a massaging action due to the helix.

It is admittedly known in the case of drum brushes for car washing installations (DE-U-93 19 214) to use profiled bristles, which are also twisted. However, in this case with a helix having an extremely steep pitch of several centimetres bristle length a gentle treatment is to be provided and opposing demands are not fulfilled (brushing and restrained massaging).

Advantageously, at least part of the bristles have a single or multiple pitch or thread helix, so that the surfaces active during cleaning are enlarged and simultaneously different action directions are obtained.

Another preferred development is characterized in that the bristles comprise a core and at least one helix passing over the circumferential surface. The core gives the brush the standard characteristics (bendability, re-righting capacity, etc.)

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It is also advantageous if the helix has a trapezoidal cross-section, the head of the helix being preferably flattened or rounded, so that no sharp edges occur. This can take place during extrusion or subsequently by mechanical or thermal action.

For certain fields of use, it must be ensured that a user recognizes as such brushes having particularly abrasively acting spiral bristles and does not use same erroneously for the treatment of sensitive gums. Thus, according to a further development of the invention, at least one rib has a different colour to the core. The plastic for the rib can be coloured by pigments. As the pigment particles are harder than the plastic matrix, the helix has a certain abrasive action as a result of the colouring.

Preferably the core and at least one rib are made from different materials. Thus, the at least one rib can be adapted to specific use conditions, particularly with respect to its hardness. Information can be provided to the user regarding the brushing characteristics of the particular brush by a different colour design of the core and the ribs. Such ribs can be easily obtained in that the monofilament has a polygonal, preferably square cross-section. Then, after twisting, each edge forms a rib.

It is necessary with certain brushes for the bristles to have a predetermined stiffness or elasticity. A stiffness adaptation can be obtained, according to a preferred development of the invention, if the core has an outer core and an envelope, which surrounds the latter, made from different materials. Through the choice of the materials for the outer core and the envelope, the stiffness and elasticity of the bristles on the one hand and their action in the case of dental care on the other can be influenced and varied in a desired way. The ribs on the envelope can either be made from the material of the latter or from a different material.

The bristles preferably comprise a profiled and subsequently twisted monofilament, the profile areas projecting beyond a fictional circular cross-section and whose centre forms the twist axis, in each case form a helix.

The brushing action is inter alia dependent on the extent of the twisting

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relative to the effective length of a bristle or the bristle material, i.e. on the pitch of the helix formed as a result of twisting. It has been found that the helix pitch should not be greater than twice the effective length of the bristle, so that along the effective length is provided a helix extending over 180°. However, normally the helix has a smaller pitch extending up to the bristle material diameter.

According to a further development of the invention, the monofilament or monofilaments are made from an elastic plastic. In this way the bristles made from the bristle material can expand longitudinally, which leads to a reduction of their diameter, so that e.g. following introduction into an interdental space, they can be more easily extracted therefrom and do not jam therein. Jamming is prevented in that the bristle can twist on extraction.

If necessary, the bristles may only have a helix over part of their length. In order to adapt the action of a brush to given framework conditions, spiral bristles can be combined with bristles of other configurations and processed together.

For the manufacture of a bristle for a toothbrush having the aforementioned construction, the invention proposes that a monofilament with at least one axially parallel rib is extruded, twisted and then the twist is fixed. The bristles can then be manufactured by cutting to length from a continuous strand.

Another method comprises a monofilament made from one plastic being co-extruded together with ribs running over its circumferential surface made from a plastic having other characteristics, followed by the twisting of the co-extruded composite and finally the twist is fixed.

This method also permits a continuous manufacture of the bristle material. The plastic forming the helix can also be adapted to the intended use. For example, the core can be made from the plastic conventionally used for bristles, whereas the plastic used for the helix is made softer or harder or can be provided with abrasive fillers. The plastic forming the helical ribs can also have a different colouring, so as to permit a functional indication.

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The core can also be made from zonally different materials, so as to adapt the bristle to its intended use. The core has a inner area and an envelope surrounding said inner area made from different materials and which are co-extruded.

Another manufacturing possibility consists of extruding at least two monofilaments, which are then twisted and the twist is then fixed. During extrusion or after twisting, the monofilaments can be non-detachably interconnected.

The bristle according to the invention also offers the possibility of the extruded monofilament or the co-extruded composite being stretched prior to twisting and optionally stabilized, in order to give the bristle with the helix the characteristics necessary for bristles used in toothbrushes.

Finally, as in conventional bristles, it is advantageous if the monofilament or the co-extruded composite, following twisting, are heat stabilized and then stored for 24 to 48 h.

In the case of toothbrushes, the bristle ends must be rounded after trimming, in order to avoid damage to teeth and injuries to the gums. This advantageously takes place by the surface melting of the bristle ends, because the ends of the thin-walled helix melt before the core and consequently the sharp edges initially re-form.

A bristle manufactured according to one of the aforementioned methods is also eminently suitable as or for interdental cleaners. In the case of an interdental cleaner other advantages arise, if it is only twisted in one area of its length. The untwisted area has smaller cross-sectional dimensions and can consequently more easily be introduced into an interdental space. Introduction can be further facilitated if the untwisted area at least zonally has a cross-section flattened e.g. by pressing.

In order to ensure a completely satisfactory and extraction-resistant fixing of the bristles to the brush body, the bristles individually or groupwise are melted at their fastening-side end onto a head and anchored therewith in the brush body. As a result the fastening-side end has a uniform spherical or

lenticular cross-section permitting a completely satisfactory anchoring in the brush head.

The invention is described in greater detail hereinafter relative to embodiments and the attached drawings, wherein show:

Fig. 1 A diagrammatic side view of a toothbrush.

Fig. 2 A larger scale detail view of a bristle.

Figs. 3 to 5 Different cross-sectional shapes of an extruded monofilament.

Figs. 6 to 11 Different cross-sectional shapes of a co-extruded composite.

The toothbrush according to fig. 1 has a head 30 and a handle 31, which are interconnected by means of a flexible neck 32. The head 30, handle 31 and neck 32 are injection moulded from plastic in one piece. Bristles in the form of bundles 33 are fixed to the head 30. The bundles 33 are only diagrammatically indicated and in each case comprise a plurality of plastic bristles, which are fixed by welding, injecting or mechanically to the head 30.

Fig. 2 shows a single bristle 1 from a bundle 33. It comprises a circular cylindrical core 2, on whose circumferential surface is provided a two-pitch helix 4 with the two helices 5, 6. Each helix 5, 6 has a flattened or rounded head 7 or 8. Such a bristle for toothbrushes can e.g. have an external diameter of approximately 0.2 mm, the core 2 having a diameter of approximately 0.1 to 0.15 mm. For the bristle length of up to 1.5 cm conventionally used for toothbrushes, the helix has a pitch of 2 to 6.

The bristle according to fig. 2 can be manufactured in different ways. For example, a monofilament 9 according to fig. 3 can be extruded, stretched, twisted and finally heat fixed with a core 10 and two diametrically positioned ribs 11, 12, so as to give a two-pitch helix according to fig. 2. Fig. 4 shows an extruded monofilament 9 with an approximately triangular cross-section formed by a core 13 and three ribs 14, 15, 16. Fig. 5 shows a monofilament 9 with a cruciform cross-section, which once again has a core 17 and

four symmetrically arranged ribs 18, 19, 20 and 21. The twist axis in all the embodiments coincides with the axis of the core 2. The monofilament can also have a substantially rectangular, e.g. square cross-section, the core area close to the centre and the four corner regions forming the ribs.

Figs. 6 to 8 show in substantially the same cross-sectional forms as figs. 3 to 5, but in this case the circular cylindrical cores 10, 13, 17 are co-extruded with the ribs 11, 12 or 14 to 16 or 18 to 21. The extruded monofilament or the co-extruded composite is then stretched, twisted and heat stabilized and stored for 1 to 2 days.

Figs. 9 to 11 show similar cross-sectional shapes to figs. 6 to 8, but the cores 10, 13, 17 have an outer core 10a, 13a and 17a and surrounding the latter envelopes 10b, 13b and 17b. The outer core and envelope are made from different materials. The ribs 11, 12 or 14 to 16 or 18 to 21 are made from a further material. The outer core is co-extruded with the envelope and the ribs and is subsequently worked in the indicated manner. The outer core 10a, 13a and 17a can be made from a typical plastic for toothbrush bristles, in order to ensure all the positive strength characteristics of a conventional bristle, whereas the plastics material for the envelope 10b, 13b, 17b and for the ribs 11, 12 or 14 to 16 or 18 to 21 can be matched to the desired cleaning and/or massaging action.

As can in particular be gathered from figs. 3 to 11 and as described relative to fig. 2, the head of the ribs is flattened or rounded. After cutting the bristles to length from the continuous material, the use-side ends are rounded, preferably by surface premelting, whereas the fastening-side ends are individually or groupwise melted to a head.

Instead of the cross-section shown, the bristle 1 or the monofilament from which it is made, can also have a rectangular and preferably square cross-section. After twisting, the edges of said cross-section form in each case a rib.

CLAIMS



1. Toothbrush with a brush head and with plastic bristles, optionally combined into bundles, fixed thereto, whereof at least certain bristles have a profile on their circumferential surface, characterized in that the bristles (1) have a helix as the profile.
2. Toothbrush according to claim 1, characterized in that at least part of the bristles (1) has a one or multiple-pitch helix (5, 6).
3. Toothbrush according to claim 1 or 2, characterized in that the bristles (1) comprise a core (2) and at least one helix (4) passing over the circumferential surface (3).
4. Toothbrush according to claim 1, characterized in that the helix (4) has a substantially trapezoidal cross-section.
5. Toothbrush according to claim 1 and 4, characterized in that the head of the helix (4) is flattened or rounded.
6. Toothbrush according to claim 3, characterized in that the helix and core have different colours.
7. Toothbrush according to claim 3, characterized in that the helix and core are made from different materials.
8. Toothbrush according to claim 3, characterized in that the core has a heart (10a, 13a, 17a) and an envelope (10b, 13b, 17b) surrounding the latter and made from different materials.
9. Toothbrush according to claims 1 and 3, characterized in that the bristles comprise a profiled and subsequently twisted monofilament (9).
10. Toothbrush according to claim 1 and 9, characterized in that the helix pitch is no greater than twice the effective length of the bristle and no smaller than the bristle diameter.

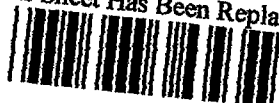
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11. Toothbrush according to claim 10, characterized in that the bristle (1) has at least two turns per cm of length.
12. Toothbrush according to claim 11, characterized in that the bristle (1) has three to five turns per cm of length.
13. Toothbrush according to claim 9, characterized in that the monofilament or monofilaments are made from elastic plastic.
14. Toothbrush according to claim 1 and 3, characterized in that the bristle (1) only has a helix over part of its length.
15. Method for the manufacture of a plastic bristle for a toothbrush according to one of the claims 1 to 14, characterized in that a profiled monofilament (9) or a monofilament with at least one axially parallel rib (11, 12; 14 to 16; 18 to 21) is extruded, then twisted over at least part of its length and the twist is fixed.
16. Method for the manufacture of a plastic bristle for a toothbrush according to one of the claims 1 to 14 or for an interdental cleaner, characterized in that a monofilament made from one plastic is co-extruded together with the ribs made from a plastic having other characteristics running over its circumferential surface characteristics, then the co-extruded composite is twisted over at least part of its length and the twist is fixed.
17. Method according to claim 15 or 16, characterized in that the extruded monofilament or the co-extruded composite is stretched prior to twisting.
18. Method according to claim 15 or 16, characterized in that the monofilament or co-extruded composite is heat stabilized after twisting.
19. Method according to claim 18, characterized in that the twisted monofilament or twisted composite, following heat stabilization, is stored at an optionally increased temperature.
20. Method according to claim 15 or 16, characterized in that



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the use-side end of each bristle is rounded by surface melting.

21. Method according to claim 15 or 16, characterized in that the bristles are individually or groupwise melted on their fastening-side end to a head and anchored therewith in the brush body.



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