

In the quest for a pill to fix everything and sell as much of it as possible, the "miracle rinse" is a favorite. Dental marketers promise effortless oral hygiene, with Pfizer running commercials stating that Listerine was as effective as flossing. A judge eventually ruled that claim was false, and Pfizer had to stop. The judge said "substantial evidence" demonstrates that flossing is important in reducing tooth decay and gum disease and that it cannot be replaced by rinsing with a mouthwash.

Prescription rinse chlorhexidine is an approved antibacterial rinse, and is effective for short-term management of periodontal infections, and there may be some evidence that alum is helpful in managing plaque.

Is it harmful to use a rinse? That depends on the rinse. A more important question might be what do you hope to accomplish? You should avoid any rinses with alcohol, which can exacerbate certain problems, and various other harsh ingredients may be harmful. 3% Hydrogen peroxide has FDA approval as a mouthrinse and is recommended in the Merck manual for treatment of "trench mouth"(though that is disputed). Salt water, herbal, and essential oil rinses may also be effective. None of these rinses have enough commercial backing to fund undisputed studies. Frequent rinses with plain water have been shown to be as effective as over-the-counter rinses.

You definitely do not want to use any rinse sweetened with sugar. And if you are trying to keep your teeth as white as possible, why would you rinse with anything that has any dye in it at all?

Though they may leave your mouth with a clean fresh taste, some rinses can be harmful, concealing bad breath and unpleasant taste that are signs of periodontal diseases which cause inflammation and degeneration of the supporting structures of the teeth and tooth decay. Fluoride rinses may be critical for individuals with decay problems, but as always, proper and daily brushing and flossing are still the only way to keep those pearly whites and avoid extra dental visits. If you are really concerned about bad breath, do not forget the tongue scraping.