

Clean and tidy





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Cloths

Wool and linen cloths were used by Tudor people to clean their teeth – there were no toothbrushes at this time.

Worn out clothes were torn and used as cloths; larger pieces were used as household cleaning cloths, smaller pieces for washing bodies and cleaning teeth.

People cleaned their teeth by removing bits of food with toothpicks, then rubbing their teeth with chewed twigs, or damp cloth or sponge dipped into the tooth cleaner of their choice. There was no toothpaste at this time.

Richer people usually used salt to clean their teeth but they also used powdered alabaster or pumice stone, or ground cuttlefish bones. Poor people used soot, or other cheaper abrasive powders – there are even recipes for teeth cleaning powders made from ground up animal bones.

After cleaning, people rinsed their mouths and used chalk dust to whiten their teeth. People often swilled their mouths out afterwards with 'mouthwashes', mixtures of herbs and sometimes white wine or vinegar, and freshened their breath by chewing herbs and spices.



How do we know about teeth cleaning cloths?

Tudor records and books describe how people cleaned their teeth.



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Comb

This wooden comb was used to clean the hair, by removing lice and their nits, then the wider teeth were used to groom and style hair.

Tudor combs were usually made from wood, bone or ivory, but could also be made from shell and horn.

Wood combs were often soaked in oil, which helped their teeth slide through the hair more easily. Perfumed oil could be used, as this would leave the hair sweetly scented.

Medicated oils, such as the oil made from parsley seeds, and from the seeds of spurge or garden spurge, could also be used to soak the comb before use, to repel head lice.



How do we know about combs?

Illustrations and descriptions in Tudor documents, and finds made during archaeological excavations.



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Mirror

This polished bronze mirror has fine decorative enamelling, and a cloth lined wood case.

Most rich Tudors used polished metal mirrors, and most poor Tudors didn't have mirrors at all.

Rich Tudors travelled extensively in Britain, and Europe, and sometimes further afield, and a mirror like this was easy to transport safely, as the cloth lining protected the surface of the mirror from scratches.

Extremely rich Tudors may have been using glass mirrors in their homes, possibly even as early as the 12th century, as glass mirrors were made in Venice or Nuremburg at that time. The mirror makers of Venice and Nuremburg were very careful not to tell anybody else how silvered glass was made, and glass mirrors were not made anywhere else until the 1700s.



How do we know about metal mirrors?

Illustrations and descriptions in Tudor documents, and finds made during archaeological excavations.



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Toiletry set

This set of silver tools is for personal hygiene use. Toiletry sets were also called Chatelaine sets, as they were often worn hanging from belts or girdles, and were usually made of metal or bone.

This Chatelaine set includes the main tools people would use to look after themselves – a pick, a nail file, tweezers, and a small scoop.

Pick – people used picks to remove food from between their teeth, and also to remove dirt from under nails.

Nail trimming tool – people trimmed their nails by rubbing this tool back and forth with the nail in the slit between the prongs. This tool shaves small slivers of nail off rather than wearing the nail away as modern nail files do.

Tweezers – people used tweezers to remove hairs from eyebrows, noses and ears.

Scoop – people probably used this scoop for removing ear wax.



How do we know about toiletry sets?

Illustrations and descriptions in Tudor documents, and finds made during archaeological excavations.

