

# Miswak

“Swak” redirects here. For the acronym SWAK, see [Sealed with a kiss](#) (disambiguation). For the UK skeptical podcast, see [Skeptics with a K](#).

The **miswak** (*miswaak*, *siwak*, *sewak*, مِسْوَك) is a



Traditional miswak sticks. Softened bristles on either end can be used to clean the teeth.

teeth cleaning twig made from the *Salvadora persica* tree (known as *arak* in Arabic). A traditional alternative to the modern toothbrush, it has a long, well-documented history and is reputed for its medicinal benefits.<sup>[1]</sup> It also features prominently in Islamic hygienical jurisprudence.

The *miswak* is predominant in Muslim-inhabited areas. It is commonly used in the Arabian peninsula, the Horn of Africa, North Africa, parts of the Sahel, the Indian subcontinent, Central Asia and Southeast Asia. In Malaysia, miswak is known as *Kayu Sugi* (Malay for 'chewing stick').

## 1 Hadith

It is often mentioned that the Islamic Prophet Muhammad recommended the *miswak*'s use. He is quoted in various hadith extolling its virtues:<sup>[2][3]</sup>

## 2 Science

### 2.1 Studies

A 2003 scientific study comparing the use of *miswak* with ordinary toothbrushes concluded that the results clearly were in favor of the users who had been using the *miswak*,

provided they had been given proper instruction in how to brush using it.<sup>[4]</sup> However, the study's sample size was only fifteen people, calling into question its statistical significance. The World Health Organization (WHO) recommended the use of the *miswak* in 1986 and in 2000 an international consensus report on oral hygiene concluded that further research was needed to document the effect of the *miswak*.<sup>[5]</sup>

Dr. Rami Mohammed Diabi,<sup>[6]</sup> who spent more than 17 years researching the effects of *miswak* on health, and especially its anti-addiction effects on smokers (curative and preventive sides), has opened a field of science and research with his last publication: “Miswak Medicine Theory” or Sewak Puncture medicine<sup>[7]</sup> which led him to what is called *Beyond Sewak: World of Science and Research*.<sup>[8]</sup> *Miswak* also is contributing in the fight against desertification,<sup>[9]</sup> thereby affecting our environment and global climate.

### 2.2 Miswak extract vs. oral disinfectants

Studies indicate that *Salvadora persica* extract exhibits low antimicrobial activity compared to other oral disinfectants and anti-plaque agents like Triclosan and Chlorhexidine Gluconate.<sup>[10][11]</sup>

[11]

## 3 Religious prescriptions



A pack of miswak sticks.

The use of the *miswak* is frequently advocated in the *hadith* (the traditions relating to the life of Muhammad).

Situations where the *miswak* is recommended to be used include, before religious practice, before entering one's house, before and after going on a journey, on Fridays,<sup>[12]</sup> before sleeping and after waking up, when experiencing hunger or thirst and before entering any good gathering.

In addition to strengthening the gums, preventing tooth decay and eliminating toothaches, the *miswak* is said to halt further decay that has already set in. Furthermore, it is reputed to create a fragrance in the mouth, eliminate bad breath, improve sensitivity of taste-buds and promote cleaner teeth.

## 4 Examples of hadith concerning the miswak

From Sahih al-Bukhari:

Narrated Abu Hurairah:

The Prophet said, "If somebody eats or drinks forgetfully then he should complete his fast, for what he has eaten or drunk, has been given to him by God." Narrated 'Amir bin Rabi'a, "I saw the Prophet cleaning his teeth with Siwak while he was fasting so many times as I can't count." And narrated Abu Huraira, "The Prophet said, 'But for my fear that it would be hard for my followers, I would have ordered them to clean their teeth with Siwak on every performance of ablution.'" The same is narrated by Jabir and Zaid bin Khalid from the Prophet who did not differentiate between a fasting and a nonfasting person in this respect (using Siwak).

Aisha said, "The Prophet said, "It (i.e. Siwak) is a purification for the mouth and it is a way of seeking the acceptance of God." Ata' and Qatada said, "There is no harm in swallowing the resultant saliva."

Narrated Abu Burda: My father said, "I came to the Prophet and saw him carrying a Siwak in his hand and cleansing his teeth.

From Sahih Muslim:

'Abd al-Rahman son of Abu Sa'id al-Khudri reported on the authority of his father that the Messenger of God said: Bathing on Friday for every adult, using of Miswak and applying some perfume or cologne, that is available-these are essential.

## 5 Maintenance

A *miswak* should be one hand span in length when selected. If it becomes dry, it should be soaked in rose wa-



A miswak stick.

ter to soften the end bristles. The end should be cut afresh to ensure hygiene and should never be stored near a toilet or sink. The brush may be created by cutting *Salvadora persica's* branches instead of its roots; keeping in mind that the tree's roots can retain humidity more so than its branches. This favors more long-term usage.

There is also a toothpaste made from miswak extract that can be purchased in the Middle East, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Europe and North America. Use of toothpastes featuring benefits of *miswak* is, however, not a true alternate practice of using *miswak* in its original shape and in the *masnoon* way. Some companies, such as Al Khair and AL Falah, have also taken the initiative to process and preserve *miswak*. This has the effect of increasing the twig's shelf life to a period of over six months.

## 6 References

- [1] IslamKotob, *Muslims and Science*, (Islamic Books), p.30.
- [2] "Miswak" at sunnah.com.
- [3] "Siwak" at searchtruth.com.
- [4] Al-Otaibi M, Al-Harthy M, Soder B, Gustafsson A, Angmar-Mansson B. (2003). "Comparative effect of chewing sticks and toothbrushing on plaque removal and gingival health." *Oral Health Prev Dent* 1 (4): 301-7. PMID 15643758.
- [5] Undersøkelse av en aktuell eldgammel munnrengjøringsmetode in Norwegian
- [6] Untitled requires log in
- [7] Miswak Medicine Theory
- [8] Beyond Sewak Worlds Researches Page
- [9] See effects of *Salvadora Persica* "Miswak tree" on stopping deserts and fixing the soil - Thrust Areas of Research
- [10] Almas, K. (August 2002). "The effect of *Salvadora persica* extract (miswak) and chlorhexidine gluconate on human dentin: a SEM study." *J Contemp Dent Pract.* 3 (3): 27-35. PMID 12239575.

- [11] Almas, K; Skaug, N; Ahmad, I. (February 2005). "An in vitro antimicrobial comparison of miswak extract with commercially available non-alcohol mouthrinses.". *Int J Dent Hyg.* **3** (1): 18–24. doi:10.1111/j.1601-5037.2004.00111.x. PMID 16451373.
- [12] <http://hadith.al-islam.com/Display/hier.asp?Doc=0&n=1417>

## 7 Further reading

- Islamic Research on Miswak (Dr. Al Sahli)
- Khan, Tehmeena, Toothbrush (Miswak), in Muhammad in History, Thought, and Culture: An Encyclopedia of the Prophet of God (2 vols.), Edited by C. Fitzpatrick and A. Walker, Santa Barbara, ABC-CLIO, 2014.

## 8 External links

- Article on Miswak
- Miswak Is Ecological
- The Miswaak Page - Guidelines and Information
- IslamWeb
- Al Khair - Miswak
- Al-Badr Collection - Miswak

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