

Focus: Getting to the Point of Sharpening



Here Lies Arkansas Stone May He Rest In Pieces

by Nancy Johnston, RDH • mdhsmiles@mac.com

The title sounds a little ghoulish, I know, but it *is* October, and I've decided to fantasize about never having to sharpen my instruments again! It is definitely not one of my top ten things to do, but who among us doesn't absolutely love the freshness of a nice sharp new scaler? I have been witness to many a student dental hygienist agonizing over not being able to apply all the considerable skills of angulation, steadfast grip, clock positioning,... and then actually knowing when to STOP! *before* they ruin their instruments.

Even if you truly believe that you are pretty good at sharpening, have you ever looked at the results of your attempts through loupes or a microscope? It could be a real eye

opener! According to an article by Jennifer Schultz, RDH, "Ideally, instruments should be sharpened before use on every patient. Realistically, they should be sharpened at least once per week. In the majority of offices, sharpening may not even be accomplished once a month. [...] It is extremely difficult for dental hygienists to become proficient in sharpening when they do not have much time to devote to it."¹

Where does your practice realistically fit in to that timeline? Sending instruments out to a sharpening service is also an option, but this may require you to have even more instruments in work rotation.

It also occurs to me that our valuable clinical time is better spent tending to the ever-pressing needs of our clients, and that having properly sharpened instruments, and equipment that is in working order, is our responsibility. Never mind that in your dental practice, you may actually have no control over how your day is scheduled or the maintenance issues in your office; it all comes down to your responsibility as a regulated health care professional.



Even those of us who are privileged to be running our own dental hygiene practices and free to schedule our own days know that there are many other tasks that require our precious time and compete for our attention!

A few years ago, I stumbled upon some incredible technology when it comes to building a better instrument. "There IS a NEVER sharpen option!" That sounded too good to be true, so I had to investigate. I organized a little dinner and invited some of my closest dental hygiene friends, and we really were intrigued by what this company had to offer.

American Eagle is an instrument manufacturer located in Missoula, Montana, which has patented a technology called XP. This is not a coating that wears off. It is actually a process using titanium nitride and stainless steel, rendering the resulting alloy considerably harder than regular stainless steel.

This quick YouTube video helps to illustrate the difference between a regular steel-bladed instrument and an XP Technology instrument. m.youtube.com/watch?v=w5dr5TGD9bo

Another consideration is ergonomics. You will be surprised by how much a lighter grasp and light



shaving strokes help you quickly remove deposits, which may result in less hand and wrist fatigue for you and improved comfort for your client. The instruments are extremely sharp and thinner than standard stainless steel scalers, allowing for ease of access subgingivally and interproximally.

This video illustrates how to use XP Technology:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=afipG1y7osk

I have been integrating XP Technology into my cassettes for the past year, and it amazes me that after 24 years of only using the “top instrument brand,” I find myself favouring the kits containing my XP instruments. There are double-bladed designs and universals available as well, which translates to fewer instruments required in each set up and less switching of instruments and ends.

You can even order Cone socket handles and “Quick-Tips,” which means that, when it is time to replace your instrument, the only thing you need to replace is the actual end of the scaler! (A great eco-friendly option!)

Factor in the frustration and time spent sharpening, and I think you’ll agree these are worth a try. My advice would be to order a few of your favourite instruments (I like the Blackjack) and test how they perform for you. If you are cautious about changing your instruments, check out American Eagle products at the next dental convention!



I find the XP Technology works well with how my protocols have evolved. I spend the majority of my time working with piezo ultrasonic, zeroing in on debridement and biofilm removal, but still like the feel of hand scaling for finishing strokes. The lighter exploratory touch and shaving strokes required to clear contact points, or that extra little scale required after checking your work with floss, are achieved easily when working with a nice sharp instrument.

Find out more by visiting the American Eagle website. There are even some great offers under the “PROMOTIONS” tab!

www.am-eagle.com/products/xp-technology

*Images courtesy of American Eagle Instruments, Inc.

Reference

1. Schultz J. How instruments increase productivity. *rdhmag.com* 2013;April 1:2-4.