



Wire Brush Bristles: The Worst BBQ Ingredient

by Matt Sheehan

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Spring has sprung, and that means grilling season has come back after its winter hibernation.



But as Americans enjoy grilling their burgers, chicken, vegetables and more, there's one ingredient you want to steer clear of.

"These short, metal brushes that you clean your grill with," Brian Curtis, M.D., vice president of the Clinical Specialty Services at OSF HealthCare says. "There are about 150-200 cases a year that occur in the United States. They may be underreported, but those are the ones that we know about."

While barbecues over an outdoor grill are a great way for people to come together and enjoy a meal, Dr. Curtis says it could be an extremely painful experience if you end up swallowing a bristle from a wire brush.

"The bristles can become embedded in your tongue. They can be embedded in the back of your throat, esophagus, stomach, and small intestine," Dr. Curtis says. "They can cause perforations, because it's like swallowing a small needle. There are people every year that have surgeries trying to find these small objects because they are very tiny."

So how can you keep your food on the grill from getting an unwanted extra ingredient? Dr. Curtis says it's all about preparation.

"You can use aluminum foil. Some people use nylon (scrapers)," Dr. Curtis says. "I just use a wool brush on mine. If you don't want to go away from the wire brush, then you really have to inspect your grill very closely to make sure there's nothing stuck on it."

Dr. Curtis says if you believe you've swallowed a wire brush bristle, you need to be evaluated immediately.