

Good Health

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HEALTHY PRESENTS



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The toothpaste that fixes broken bones

By ESME McAVOY

A NEW 'injectable bone' material could soon be used to help heal bones that are damaged or broken.

The paste, which has the texture of toothpaste, can be injected into the damaged area. It can fill any cavity shape and hardens within 15 minutes at body temperature, taking on similar characteristics to normal bone.

Normally, a broken bone is able to heal itself. However, with severe breaks or following the removal of cancerous tumours, patients may need a bone graft to help stimulate new growth.

In conventional bone graft surgery, which is carried out on around 10,000 Britons every



Picture: FOGSTOCK LLC

order to inject it, the procedure will most likely be done under general anaesthetic, with X-rays and scans to guide the needle to the correct area.

'Once inside the body, the paste will harden to the strength of normal bone, but there will be plenty of space for new bone to grow,' says Professor Kevin Shakesheff, who led the research at the University of Nottingham's School of Pharmacy.

Because the paste is porous, it has small holes to support new cell bone growth.

After three to four months, the injected bone will gradually degrade into the bloodstream, before being passed out in the urine, leaving the newly grown bone in its place.

SOME artificial bone material already available is also able to degrade, but the disadvantage is the temperature