

Flossing

What is flossing?

Flossing is a method for removing bacteria and other debris that cannot be reached by a toothbrush. It generally entails a very thin piece of synthetic cord you insert and move up and down between the sides of two adjoining teeth.

Why is flossing important?

Many dentists believe that flossing is the single most important weapon against plaque. In any event, daily flossing is an excellent and proven method for complementing your brushing routine and helping to prevent cavities, periodontal disease, and other dental problems later in life. It also increases blood circulation in your gums. Floss removes plaque and debris that stick to your teeth and gums.

How often to floss

Floss at least once every day. Like brushing, flossing should take about three minutes and can easily be done while doing another activity, such as watching television. Do not attempt to floss your teeth while operating a motor vehicle or other machinery.

Flossing techniques

There are two common methods for flossing, the "spool method" and the "loop method".

The spool method is the most popular for those who do not have problems with stiff joints or fingers. The spool method works like this: Break off about 18 inches of floss and wind most of it around your middle finger. Wind the rest of the floss similarly around the middle finger of your other hand. This finger takes up the floss as it becomes soiled or frayed. Move the floss between your teeth with your index fingers and thumbs. Maneuver the floss up and down several times forming a "C" shape around the tooth. While doing this, make sure you go below the gum line, where bacteria are known to collect heavily.

The loop method is often effective for children or adults with dexterity problems like arthritis. The loop method works like this: Break off about 18 inches of floss and form it into a circle. Tie it securely with two or three knots. Place all of your fingers, except the thumb, within the loop. Use your index fingers to guide the floss through your lower teeth, and use your thumbs to guide the floss through the upper teeth, going below the gum line and forming a "C" on the side of the tooth.

With either method of flossing, never "snap" the floss because this can cut your gums. Make sure that you gently scrape the side of each tooth with the floss.

Your gums may be tender or even bleed for the first few days after flossing - a condition that generally heals within a few days.

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