

## Flossing

# Why it's essential for your oral health

Here's something you may not know - nearly half of the surface area of your teeth lies between them.

And no, we're not telling you this so you can ace your next trivia night.

Why that particular piece of information is important is because if you're solely relying on brushing, you're not cleaning a large portion of your teeth effectively, which in turn can negatively affect the health of your teeth and gums. This is why flossing should be an essential part of your oral care routine, and not some kind of optional extra.

Flossing can help remove the plaque from between your teeth, which assists in the prevention of gum disease, tooth decay, and "bad breath" (technically known as halitosis). That's a lot of upside for just a couple of minutes spent each day flossing in between your teeth.

### Make it a part of your routine

When you floss is entirely up to you but it's best to do it at a time when you're not in a rush or you are too tired to do it justice. People who are too tired at the end of the day may benefit from flossing first thing in the morning or flossing after lunch. Others might like to go to bed with a clean mouth. If you have kids, they should begin flossing as soon as they have two teeth in contact and you should help them up until about the age of 10 or until they are coordinated enough to floss on their own.

### But I have braces!

If you have braces, a bridge, or implants it is extremely important to floss correctly and regularly. You may need to use a greater floss width, incorporate interdental cleaners into your routine, or use a floss threader to get to difficult areas around braces or bridges. Your dentist will demonstrate the correct flossing technique and discuss the best options for your particular situation.

### How to floss

It's one thing to make flossing a part of your oral health care routine, quite another to do it properly. Your dentist will be able to instruct you on the correct flossing technique which should involve the following basic steps:

1. Wind about 45cm of floss around your middle fingers and grip it tightly between your thumbs and index fingers.
2. Keeping the thumb and forefingers close together, gently guide the floss between the teeth, taking care not to cut or damage your gums with abrupt movement. You should use a side-to-side motion to ensure the sides of both teeth are cleaned equally.

3. To clean the "neck" of the tooth, which is the point where it meets the gums, curl the floss and insert it gently under the gum.

If you find that this technique is too difficult, then consider using a floss threader (a nylon loop through which you thread the floss) or floss pick (the floss is held taut between two prongs on a handle) to do the job. Your dentist can also demonstrate correct flossing techniques.

### Flossing extras

Your dentist might also recommend using the following items to complement your flossing regimen:

**Interdental cleaners** - Resembling bottle brushes and coming in a range of different widths, these cleaners can be more effective than floss if you've got large gaps between your teeth. They're also a great option if you've got braces, missing teeth or gum disease. Your dentist can advise on the correct size to use.

**Irrigators** - These are electrical devices that use a steady stream of water to remove plaque and food debris from between your teeth and below your gumline.

**Interdental tips** - Flexible rubber tips that run gently along the gumline and clean away plaque and food from between your teeth and below your gumline.

You should always speak to your dentist before using any kind of interdental aid because they can damage your gums if used incorrectly. You will find all of these devices at your pharmacy or supermarket and most dentists will also be able to supply you with them.

### 3 THINGS THAT MAKES FLOSSING EASIER

1. **Learn the correct technique** - A dental professional can teach you the right technique so you can floss efficiently from the word go.
2. **Use a floss threader** - Ideal if you have braces or a bridge, these are loops of fibre that thread floss into small places around your teeth.
3. **Use a floss pick** - Made up of two prongs with dental floss strung between them, they're perfect if you struggle with traditional flossing techniques

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