

Flossing – some common questions

How often do I need to floss my teeth?

Plaque accumulates daily, and making flossing part of your daily oral hygiene is best. If you are susceptible to the more aggressive forms of gum disease (periodontitis), or are going through periodontal treatment, it is necessary to attempt to floss at least daily. Also, if you notice bleeding or a bad taste from the areas between the teeth, flossing will help eliminate these problems.

Why does the floss or tape tear to shreds between some teeth?

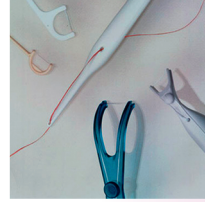
It is common for decay to occur between your teeth, and it is likely that you have fillings that extend down the sides and between your teeth. As filling materials get old, their surfaces can become pitted or rough. All of these factors can lead to tearing of the dental floss. Mention these areas to your dentist. Polishing the filling may ease the problem or it may be that the filling has reached a point where it needs to be replaced.

Is it possible to pull a filling out with dental floss?

It is very unlikely that you will pull a filling out. If it does happen, then it is a sign that the filling may have needed replacement. However, special care may need to be taken with dental crowns.

How can I reach my back teeth without gagging?

Many people have trouble reaching the back of their mouths. Floss holders are available to assist you overcome this difficulty. If you are having any problems with flossing your teeth, your dentist or dental hygienist can help you at your next visit.



Good oral hygiene begins with effective toothbrushing

- use FLUORIDATED toothpaste and a soft brush
- use short, gentle strokes
- pay extra attention to:
 - the part of the teeth closest to the gum line
 - hard-to-reach back teeth
 - areas around fillings, crowns, bridges or partial dentures
- thoroughly clean each section as follows:
 - clean the outer/cheek-side surfaces of your upper teeth
 - clean the inner/tongue-side surfaces of your upper teeth
 - clean the chewing surfaces
 - then repeat for your lower teeth
- don't rush
- an electric toothbrush can do a better job of cleaning teeth for people with limited manual dexterity

. . . . but also involves removing plaque that builds up on hard-to-reach areas of your mouth – you need to clean between your teeth

Once you have mastered a technique for cleaning between your teeth, it will readily become part of your tooth cleaning routine. The benefits for you will be healthier gums and a fresher mouth.

Further information

can be obtained from the

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Colgate Dental Education Programs

Oral hygiene

Cleaning between the teeth

Why floss?

Effective toothbrushing will control most of the plaque that builds up on your teeth but a toothbrush cannot reach the surfaces between your teeth.

Most people know about dental floss, but unlike toothbrushing, very few people become regular users of dental floss. This is because flossing can be:

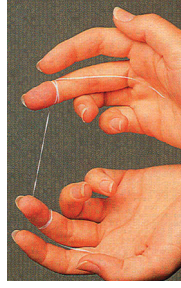
- a difficult skill to master
- time consuming.

Flossing made simple

STEP ONE

Stand in front of a well-lit mirror and examine your teeth. Identify the joins between neighbouring teeth. If you have a lot of fillings in your mouth, this may be difficult, but not impossible unless there is a problem that can only be resolved by a dentist.

STEP TWO



Pull out about 45 cm (18 inches) of floss or tape. Wind one end around the middle finger of one hand, the other around the middle finger of the other hand. Leave about 10 cm (4 inches) of floss between your hands.

STEP THREE

Use your thumb and tip of your index fingers to hook around the floss to pull it taut between your hands.

Slide this taut section which should be only about 3 cm (1 inch) in length between neighbouring teeth, a finger on one side and thumb on the other side of the tooth. Use gentle 'sawing' movements.



STEP FOUR

Move the floss up and down on the tooth surfaces, pushing back against one surface, pulling forward against the other. Floss down to the edge of the gum, but don't press so hard that it causes pain. Be careful not to injure your gums.

You may notice blood on the floss – this may indicate that plaque has accumulated between the teeth and has caused some inflammation of the gums. This should improve within a few days if you continue to floss daily. If bleeding persists, see your dentist.

STEP FIVE

Work your way around the mouth in a systematic manner, being careful not to miss the join between any teeth. Move to a new section of floss as it gets soiled by the plaque and trapped food that will be removed. Have a good rinse. Remember when you floss that you are removing plaque, not just food.

Dental floss or dental tape

There are various types of dental floss available. Dental floss is a very fine thread that is often waxed to allow it to slide between adjacent teeth. Dental tape is a thicker thread, but many people find it easier to control and move slowly between the teeth. It also tends to resist fraying. Floss or dental tape may be coloured or flavoured, but this does not make any difference to the effectiveness in controlling plaque.

Other ways of cleaning between the teeth

Superfloss is a special type of floss that has been designed to clean under bridges in your mouth, or between teeth separated by larger gaps. It has a stiff thread at either end to pass the floss under the bridge or through a gap, and the main part of the superfloss is of a thick, foam-like thread that can be moved against the tooth surface to remove plaque.

Interproximal brushes are toothbrushes that are designed to pass between teeth, and are very useful if you have larger gaps between your teeth, or a dental bridge. There are a variety of designs available, ranging from ones that look like small bottle brushes, through to small tufts of bristles. Your dentist will be able to advise you on the sites in your mouth that may benefit from these interproximal brushes.

Interdental sticks (toothpicks) have been around for centuries, and still can have a useful function in cleaning between the teeth. It is important that they are made of wood or plastic that does not splinter. Interdental sticks often have a tapered shape, ending in a blunted point. The blunted end is placed between the teeth near the gum line, and the toothpick is moved gently in and out of the gap. Care must be taken not to place too much pressure on the tip.

Plaque is the soft sticky film containing millions of bacteria that forms on the teeth continually. Plaque bacteria produce acid that attacks the teeth and toxins that irritate the gums and lead to gum disease.