

ORAL HEALTH



INFORMATION FOR ADULTS



FLOSSING AND BRUSHING

Oral Health and Adults

This fact sheet offers practical suggestions about how to care for your teeth and gums as well as tips that may make the job easier. Oral health is important for people of all ages. A healthy mouth helps people enjoy their food, chew better, eat well, and avoid pain and tooth loss. With good oral hygiene and regular visits to the dentist, you can maintain your oral health for years.

Brushing

Brushing removes dental plaque, a sticky, colorless film of bacteria on tooth surfaces. If plaque is not removed, some of it can harden below the gum line and irritate the gums.

Flossing

Flossing removes dental plaque between teeth where a toothbrush can't reach. If not removed, dental plaque can build up and cause tooth decay and gum disease.

- Follow the step-by-step guide (see next page)
- Use tools that might make flossing easier
- Floss regularly

What type of toothbrush?

- Soft bristle brush that is small enough to reach all areas of your mouth.

What type of floss?

- Waxed, unwaxed, flavored, or plain floss all do the same thing.

What if it's hard to floss?

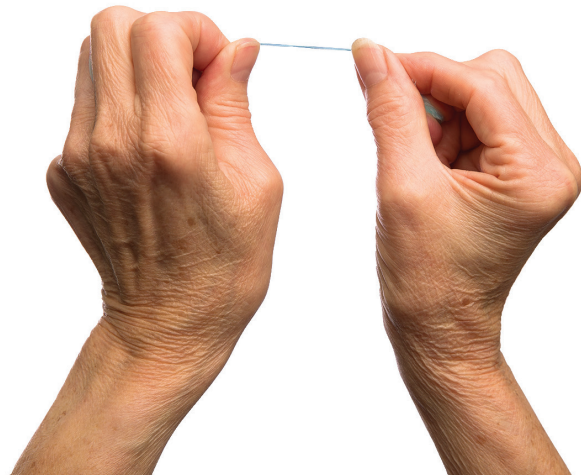
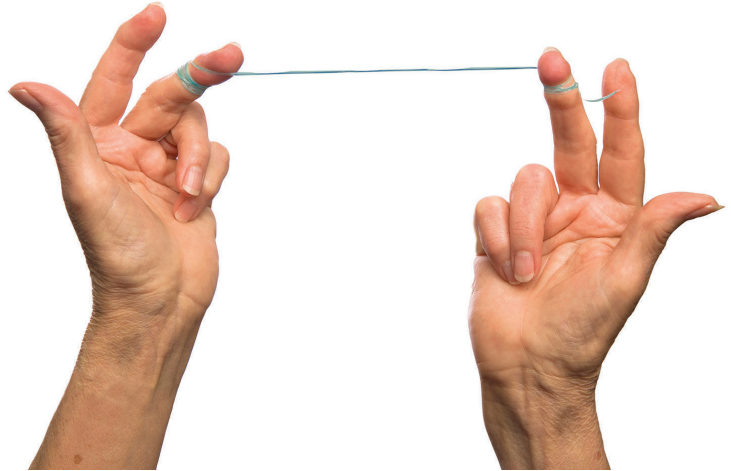
- If it's hard to floss, there are flossing tools that can help (see inside page).



Flossing Step-by-Step

Follow these steps to floss your teeth:

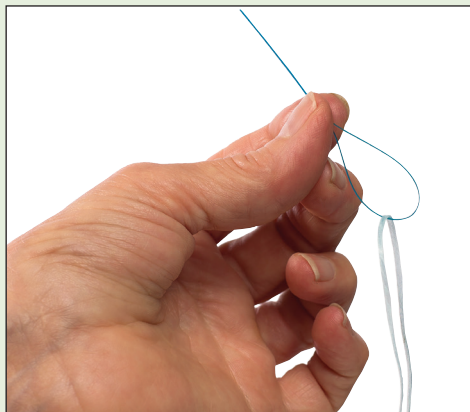
- Use a string of floss about two feet long. Wrap that piece around the middle finger of each hand.
- Grip the floss between the thumb and index finger of each hand.
- Ease the floss gently between the teeth until it reaches the gumline. (Don't 'snap' or force the floss into place – this could harm the gums.)
- Curve the floss like the letter "C" around each tooth, keeping in contact with the side of the tooth. Slide the floss up and down under the gum.
- Do this for both sides of every tooth, one side at a time. Adjust the floss a little as you move from tooth to tooth so the floss is clean for each one.
- Be sure to floss all teeth, including the backs of the last teeth on each side.
- Use flossing tools if needed.



Flossing Tools



Floss holder



Floss threader



Oral irrigator



Interdental brush

Brushing Your Teeth

To keep your teeth healthy, it is important to remove the sticky dental plaque that can cause tooth decay and gum disease.

- Gum Disease—If plaque is not removed, some of it can harden below the gum line and irritate the gums. The gums become red, swollen, and may bleed easily. These are signs of gingivitis. Gingivitis is a mild form of gum disease, and you can usually reverse it with daily brushing and flossing. If there are areas in your mouth where your gums have pulled away from the teeth (called gum recession), the exposed tooth roots can decay as well.
- Tooth Decay (cavities)—Even teeth that already have fillings are at risk for tooth decay. Plaque can build up underneath a chipped filling and cause new decay.

Brushing Tips

- Use toothpaste with fluoride. Fluoride is what protects teeth from tooth decay (cavities). It prevents decay by strengthening the tooth's hard outer surface, called enamel.
- Angle the bristles toward the gumline, so they clean between the gums and teeth.
- Brush gently using small, circular motions. Do not scrub hard back and forth.
- Brush all sides of each tooth.
- Brush your tongue.



Visiting the Dentist

You or a person you care for should have regular dental appointments. Professional cleanings are just as important as brushing and flossing at home. Regular exams can identify problems early, before they cause unnecessary pain. Before each appointment, make sure to have a list of current medications, known allergies, and any insurance or billing information.

At these visits, the dentist or dental hygienist can suggest an oral hygiene routine that may make it easier for you or a person you care for. The dentist may also prescribe a special toothpaste or mouthwash to help prevent tooth decay, or mouthwash to fight germs that cause gum disease. Follow the dentist's instructions for use.

Adapted from the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research • 1-866-232-4528 • www.nidcr.nih.gov
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