



How to Floss Correctly

A Step-by-Step Guide to Cleaning Between Your Teeth

Why Is Flossing Important?

Brushing your teeth removes plaque from the front, back, and chewing surfaces of your teeth—but it cannot effectively clean the tight spaces between them.

Dental floss removes plaque and food particles from these hard-to-reach areas, helping prevent:

- Tooth decay between the teeth
- Gum disease
- Bad breath
- Tartar buildup

Cleaning between your teeth every day is an essential part of a healthy oral hygiene routine.

Why Isn't Brushing Alone Enough?

Your toothbrush cleans about **60% of the tooth surfaces**.

The remaining surfaces are located between the teeth, where plaque commonly accumulates.

Without daily interdental cleaning, bacteria can remain in these areas and increase the risk of cavities and gum disease.

How Often Should You Floss?

The American Dental Association recommends cleaning between your teeth **once a day**.

The exact time is less important than making flossing a consistent daily habit.

Many people prefer to floss before brushing at night to remove plaque and allow fluoride toothpaste to reach between the teeth more effectively.

Choosing the Right Floss

Several types of floss are available.

Common options include:

- Waxed floss
- Unwaxed floss
- Dental tape
- PTFE (monofilament) floss
- Floss picks
- Super floss for braces and bridges

The best floss is the one you can use comfortably and consistently.

Your dentist or dental hygienist can recommend the most appropriate type for your needs.

Step-by-Step Flossing Technique

Step 1: Use Enough Floss

Break off about **18 inches (45 centimeters)** of dental floss.

Wrap most of the floss around the middle finger of one hand and the remaining floss around the middle finger of the other hand.

Leave about **1–2 inches (2.5–5 cm)** of floss to work with.

Step 2: Hold the Floss Correctly

Hold the floss tightly between your thumbs and index fingers.

Guide it gently between your teeth using a slow back-and-forth motion.

Never snap the floss into the gums.

Step 3: Curve the Floss Around the Tooth

Once the floss reaches the gumline, curve it into a **"C" shape** around one tooth.

Slide it gently beneath the gumline.

Step 4: Clean the Side of the Tooth

Move the floss up and down several times against the side of the tooth.

Then repeat the same process on the adjacent tooth before removing the floss.

Step 5: Use a Clean Section

As you move from tooth to tooth, unwind a fresh section of floss.

Using a clean section helps avoid transferring plaque and bacteria to other areas of the mouth.

Areas That Are Often Missed

Be sure to floss:

- Behind the last molars
- Around crowns
- Around bridges (if recommended)
- Between tightly spaced teeth
- Around dental implants using the cleaning method recommended by your dentist

Every tooth has two sides that need to be cleaned.

What If My Gums Bleed?

Many people notice mild bleeding when they first begin flossing regularly.

This often occurs because the gums are inflamed due to plaque buildup.

With consistent daily flossing and good brushing habits, the bleeding usually improves within **one to two weeks**.

If bleeding continues, schedule a dental examination.

Persistent bleeding may be a sign of gum disease.

Flossing with Braces

People wearing braces may need special tools, including:

- Orthodontic floss threaders
- Super floss
- Interdental brushes
- Water flossers

Cleaning carefully around brackets and wires helps reduce the risk of cavities and gum inflammation during orthodontic treatment.

Alternatives to Traditional Floss

Some people find traditional floss difficult to use.

Other options include:

- Water flossers
- Interdental brushes
- Soft picks
- Floss holders

Your dentist can recommend the most effective method based on your oral health and the spaces between your teeth.

Common Flossing Mistakes

Avoid these common mistakes:

- Flossing too aggressively
- Snapping the floss into the gums
- Flossing only the front teeth
- Reusing the same section of floss throughout the mouth
- Flossing only occasionally

Gentle, daily flossing is more effective than vigorous flossing once in a while.

When Should Children Start Flossing?

Children should begin cleaning between their teeth **once two teeth touch each other**.

Because young children usually lack the coordination to floss effectively, parents should help until the child can perform the task independently, often around **10 to 11 years of age**.

Common Myths

"If my gums bleed, I should stop flossing."

False.

Bleeding gums are often a sign of inflammation caused by plaque. Gentle daily flossing usually improves gum health over time. If bleeding persists, consult your dentist.

"Flossing creates spaces between my teeth."

False.

Proper flossing does not create gaps. It removes plaque and food particles from natural spaces that already exist between the teeth.

"I only need to floss if food gets stuck."

False.

Plaque is invisible and forms every day, even when food is not trapped between the teeth.

Key Takeaways

- ✓ Flossing removes plaque and food particles from between the teeth where a toothbrush cannot reach.
- ✓ Clean between your teeth **once every day**.
- ✓ Use a gentle "C-shaped" motion around each tooth.
- ✓ Bleeding gums often improve with regular flossing and good oral hygiene.
- ✓ Water flossers and interdental brushes may be helpful alternatives for some individuals.
- ✓ Daily flossing helps reduce the risk of cavities, gum disease, and bad breath.

References

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