

## Flossing

Brushing two times daily for at least two minutes each time is the first step in keeping your teeth and gums healthy. But even the best toothbrush cannot fully cleanse the spaces between your teeth. That's why the American Dental Association recommends you floss once a day to remove food particles and plaque— the sticky film on your teeth that can lead to cavities and gum disease.

Plaque contains cavity-causing bacteria that feed on leftover food in your mouth. These bacteria love sugary substances — and as they feast on them, they produce acids that can harm the shiny, protective surface of your teeth, setting the stage for tooth decay.

Plaque that isn't cleansed away by brushing or flossing can harden into a rough substance called tartar or calculus. Tartar builds up along your gum line, which can lead to gum disease. Once tartar forms, only your dentist can remove it, but flossing every day can prevent plaque buildup.

### What should I use to clean between my teeth?

There are many safe, effective flossing tools made for the job. You can choose from traditional dental floss — a smooth strand of nylon made to slide easily between teeth — as well as dental picks, tiny brushes or water flossers.

A water flosser, which uses a gentle stream of water to rinse away food and plaque, can be useful if you find other tools hard to work with. People with braces, bridges and other dental work may find that a water flosser helps them reach every nook and cranny.

### Should I floss before or after brushing my teeth?

As long as you floss thoroughly, it doesn't matter when you do it. The most important thing is to make flossing a daily habit. Choose a time of day when you can give your teeth a little extra attention. If you're too tired at night, try flossing in the morning or after lunch.

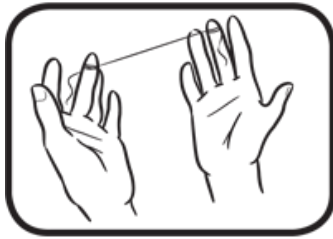
### When should children begin a flossing routine?

Flossing should become part of your child's dental care routine as soon as they have two teeth that touch. At first, adults will have to handle this step. Kids usually take over around age 10 or 11, when their hands are ready to hold floss or other cleaning tools.

## 5 Steps for Flawless Flossing

1. Break off about 18 inches of floss, wrapping most of it around one of your middle fingers. Wind the remaining floss around the same finger of the opposite hand. This finger will take up the floss as you move along.
2. Hold the floss tightly between your thumbs and forefingers.

Step 1



Step 2



3. Guide the floss between your teeth using a gentle, rubbing motion. Never snap the floss into the gums.
4. When the floss reaches the gum line, curve it into a C shape against one tooth. Gently slide it into the space between the gum and the tooth.

Step 3



Step 4



5. Hold the floss tightly against the tooth, slightly away from the gums. Gently rub the side of the tooth with an up-and-down motion, following the shape of the tooth. Repeat this method on the rest of your teeth, top and bottom. Don't forget the back side of your last teeth (at the very back of your mouth.)

Step 5

