

Keeping clean in between

Interdental care for healthy teeth and gums



You know that brushing your teeth every day can help you avoid cavities. But that's not enough to keep your teeth healthy. You may be surprised to learn that most tooth loss in adults is not caused by tooth decay—it's caused by gum disease. Gums cover and protect the bone that supports your teeth. This bone is like a foundation that supports a building—if the foundation becomes weakened, the building may fall down, even though there's nothing wrong with the building itself.

Similarly, if the gums are not cared for, the bone underneath can become infected and damaged. You can lose your teeth if the bone is not strong enough to hold your teeth in place—even if you've never had a cavity in your life!



What causes gum disease?

Gum disease is caused by *plaque*—a sticky, colorless film of bacteria that is constantly forming on your teeth. These bacteria produce toxins that can irritate the gums and damage teeth.

The earliest stage of gum disease is called *gingivitis*. This is a swelling of the gums that develops when plaque collects above and below the gumline. With proper oral care every day and regular visits to the dentist, gingivitis can be prevented or reversed because no permanent damage has occurred.

How does gum disease progress?

Left untreated, gingivitis may progress to a more severe form of gum disease called *periodontitis*. Common symptoms of periodontitis are red, swollen gums that have started to pull away from the teeth, creating *pockets*. Periodontitis damages the bone that supports the teeth. Once periodontitis develops, the damage can't be reversed: only a professional treatment program and an improved level of daily oral care at home can keep it from getting worse.



Am I at risk for gum disease?

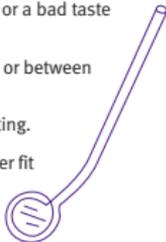
Yes, gum disease can affect you at any age; however, it most often affects adults. In fact, about three out of four adults over age 35 have gum disease now or have had it in the past.

Your risk of getting gum disease may increase if you smoke or have certain medical conditions. It is therefore vital to keep your dentist informed of your general health.

Can I tell if I have gum disease?

You may have gum disease if you notice that:

- Your gums are tender, swollen, or red.
- Your gums bleed when you brush or floss.
- You can't get rid of bad breath or a bad taste in your mouth.
- There's pus from your gumline or between your teeth.
- Your teeth are loose or separating.
- Your teeth or dentures no longer fit together correctly.



What should I do if I think I have gum disease?

Visit your dentist right away for a cleaning and exam. In most cases, gum disease can be reversed or controlled if caught and treated early enough.

Better yet, by cleaning your teeth properly every day and making regular dental visits you can help prevent gum disease from ever developing.

But remember, cleaning your teeth is a *two-step process* of brushing first followed by cleaning in between your teeth—to get to areas your toothbrush can't reach.

How should I be cleaning in between my teeth?

There are many ways to clean in between your teeth, like flossing. Did you know that if you don't floss, you're leaving up to 40% of your tooth surfaces untouched and uncleaned?

1. Take about 50 cm of floss and loosely wrap most of it around each middle finger (wrapping more around one finger than the other), leaving 5 cm of floss in between.



2. With your thumbs and index fingers holding the floss taut, gently slide it down between your teeth, while being careful not to snap it down on your gums.



3. Curve the floss around each tooth in a "C" shape and gently move it up and down the sides of each tooth, including under the gumline. Unroll a new section of floss as you move from tooth to tooth.



At first, flossing might feel awkward. But stick with it! With just a little patience and practice, it will begin to feel as natural as brushing your teeth.

My gums bleed when I floss; should I stop when this happens?

No. Don't worry about your gums bleeding at first—this is quite common. It may be a sign that you have some form of gum disease. After a few days of flossing, the bleeding should stop as your gums become healthier. If bleeding persists, consult your dentist.

How long does it take for flossing to start paying off?

The fact is, flossing provides unmistakable benefits *that start from day one*. After flossing, your teeth and gums feel cleaner because the floss reaches areas your toothbrush can't. Your breath will be fresher, and the health of your gums will improve.

So, if your dental floss is gathering dust on the bathroom shelf, why not pick it up and try again? Even if it feels awkward at first, keep practicing. Pretty soon, you'll feel the difference and find that it becomes part of your daily routine.



What kind of floss is best?

While there are a number of different kinds of floss (waxed, unwaxed, flavored), they are all designed to reach between the teeth and below the gumline to remove plaque.

So use whatever type of floss you prefer. Some of the newer flosses are easier to use: they are more shred-resistant and slide smoothly between the teeth.

If you have trouble holding or using floss, you may want to try a *dental flossette*. It eliminates the need to wrap and guide the floss between the teeth with the fingers, and can give you better control. Once the flossette is inserted between the teeth, use the same method of flossing as above. Ask your dentist or hygienist to show you if you are unsure.



If you have braces or restorative dental work (such as a bridge) that interferes with normal flossing, you may want to try a *threading floss*. This floss has a stiffened end that allows it to be threaded in between your teeth or under bridgework.



Is floss the only way to clean in between?

In addition to floss, there are other products designed for cleaning between your teeth. Ask your dentist or hygienist to help you determine which products are best for you.

Interdental brushes

If you have widely spaced teeth, braces, bridges, or implants, you may benefit from an interdental toothbrush. This toothbrush has a very small tapered or cylindrical head with fine bristles.



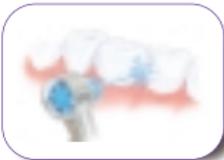
Interdental woodsticks

This is a triangular-shaped stick made of wood, used to help clean in between your teeth and massage your gums.



Irrigation devices

These use a pressurized stream of water to clean around the gumline. Most have adjustable settings for use on sensitive areas. They can be used with water alone, or with a mouth rinse. Ask your dentist or hygienist if an oral irrigator would help improve your home care.



I've never cleaned in between my teeth before; is it too late to start?

Absolutely not. Whatever your age, *interdental cleaning provides major benefits to your teeth and gums that you'll notice right away*—so the sooner you start, the better.

Interdental cleaning makes your teeth and gums feel clean because it reaches areas a toothbrush can't reach. It also keeps your breath fresh and, more importantly, it can stop gum disease in its tracks.

Isn't tooth loss a natural part of growing old?

Gum disease and tooth loss are not an inevitable part of the aging process. The fact is, you can have control over your *dental destiny*. If you brush and floss every day and see your dentist regularly, you will improve your chances of maintaining healthy teeth and gums throughout your life.

What else can flossing do for me?

Besides keeping your gums healthy, flossing can also play a role in preventing tooth decay from developing in between your teeth.



When should my children start flossing?

Consult your dentist, but a good rule of thumb is when two teeth touch. This usually happens first with the back teeth. To begin with, you will have to floss their teeth for them, but they will eventually be able to do it for themselves.

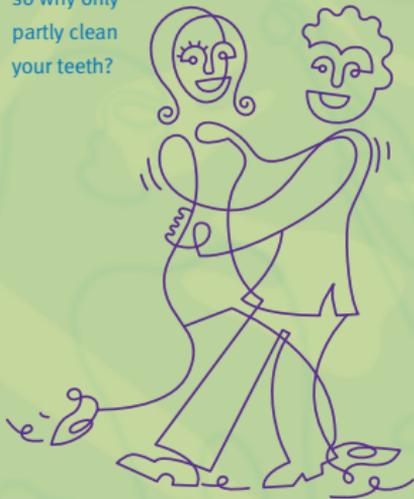
Using a dental flossette may help you and your child get used to flossing. You should continue to supervise flossing until your children are able to do a thorough job on their own.

Remember, the earlier you both start flossing, the more likely it will become part of your daily routine. So, start them off early. And one final tip: don't forget to praise your child for a job well done!



There's no time like the present to help yourself to healthier teeth and gums!

When you think about it, *keeping clean in between* simply finishes the job brushing starts. And, when you do a good job at home, you'll find that your visits to the dentist become more pleasant and relaxing, too. So start taking some positive action—after all, you wouldn't wash only part of your face, so why only partly clean your teeth?



Keeping clean in between— a quick guide:



*Brush your teeth—twice
a day, for at least
two minutes.*



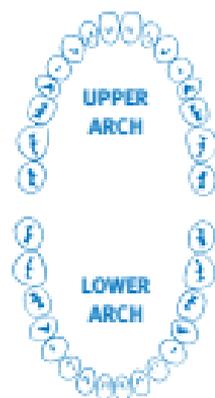
*Clean in between teeth
daily before brushing—
morning or night, it's up to you.*



*Bleeding gums may be a sign of
gum disease and should stop after
a few days of regular interdental
cleaning. If bleeding persists, con-
sult your dentist.*



*Follow your
interdental cleaning
plan—ask your dentist
to identify the areas
of your mouth on this
diagram that you
should pay special
attention to:*



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