

ORAL HEALTH

INFORMATION FOR ADULTS



FLOSSING AND BRUSHING

Oral Health and Adults

Oral health is important for people of all ages. Oral health is linked to overall health and can impact physical, psychological, financial, and social well-being. A healthy mouth helps people enjoy their food, chew better, eat well, maintain fresh breath, 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, which is a sticky, colorless film of bacteria on tooth surfaces. If plaque is not removed, some of it can harden below the gumline 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 (see page 4).
- Floss regularly.

What Type of Toothbrush?

- Use a 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.

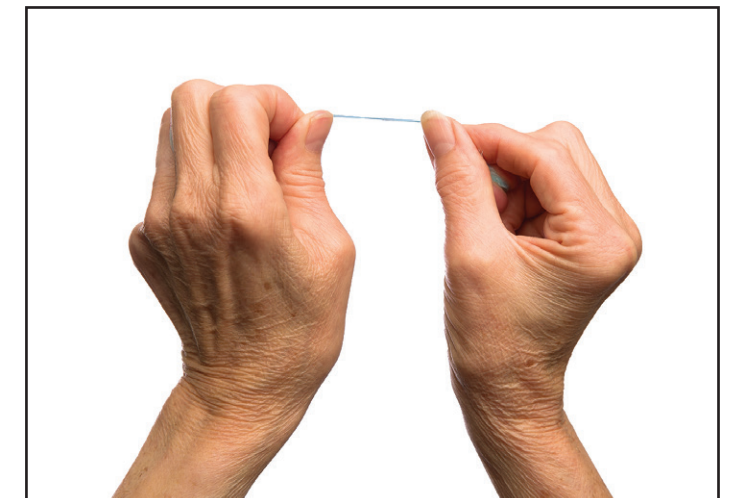
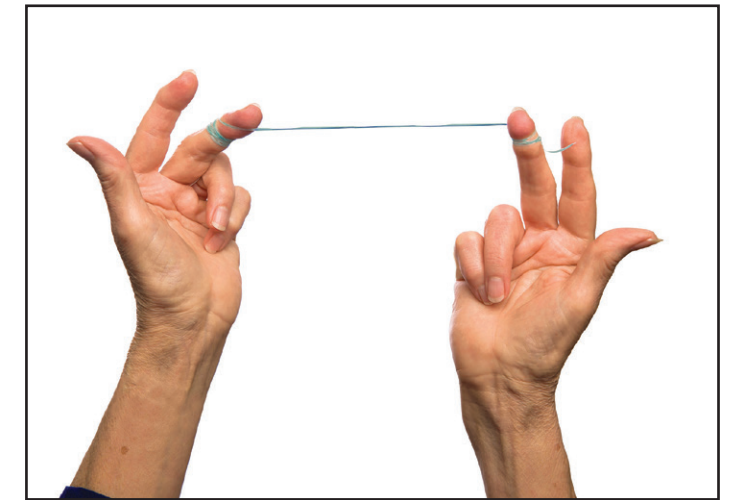


Keep your dentures clean and free from food and drinks that can cause stains or bad breath. Brush dentures every day with a denture-care product, and soak them in water or a denture-cleansing liquid at night. Be sure to leave them out of your mouth while you sleep to prevent sore gums.

Flossing Step-by-Step

Follow these steps to floss your teeth:

- Use a string of floss about one foot 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—as it 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 that 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 (see next page).



Flossing Tools



Floss holder

A small, plastic tool with a handle that holds a piece of floss. You do not need to wrap the floss around your fingers when you use this tool.



Floss threader

A plastic loop that helps pass floss through hard-to-reach or tight spaces, such as between crowded teeth, dental crowns and caps, or under dental bridges.



Water flosser

A device that sprays pulsing water between teeth.



Interdental brush

A very small (360°) brush with a handle that is shaped like a cylinder, tube, or pine tree. It can be used to clean between your teeth. It is also called a proxy brush.

Brushing Your Teeth

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

- Gum disease—If plaque is not removed, it will irritate the gums, which can 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. Severe or untreated gum disease can cause tooth loss. 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. Bacteria in plaque can get underneath a chipped or broken filling and cause new decay.

Brushing Tips

- Use toothpaste with fluoride. Fluoride is a naturally occurring mineral that protects teeth from cavities (tooth decay). It works by strengthening the tooth's hard outer surface, called enamel, to resist cavities.
- Angle the bristles toward the gumline, so that 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 to remove bacteria and help maintain fresh breath.



Visiting the Dentist

You should have regular dental appointments and check-ups. Professional cleanings are just as important as brushing and flossing at home. Regular exams can identify problems early, before they cause unnecessary pain or infection. Remember, preventive visits are painless and can help you avoid more costly treatment. For your dental visit, make sure to bring a list of your current medicines, known allergies, and any insurance or billing information.

At these visits, the dentist or dental hygienist will review your medical history and suggest an oral hygiene routine that may make it easier for you. 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 dental provider's instructions for use.

For information on finding free or low-cost dental care, visit:

- findahealthcenter.hrsa.gov
- nidcr.nih.gov/health-info/finding-dental-care

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