



To Floss or Not to Floss...That is the Question!

The primary cause of tooth decay, periodontal (gum) disease and halitosis (bad breath) is failure to remove plaque (a sticky mixture of bacteria, food and debris) from the tooth surface. The surest way to do so is to routinely brush and floss teeth.

While a toothbrush is effective in cleaning the biting, front and back surfaces of a tooth, the bristles cannot adequately clean between the teeth (interproximally or interdentially). Dental floss is the best means to remove plaque from these difficult areas.

Floss is available in a variety of forms - unwaxed or waxed, flavored or unflavored and regular or wide (dental tape). These specifications give the floss different characteristics. For example, waxed floss may be easier to slide through tight teeth or restoration contacts, while unwaxed floss will spread out its fibers during use for greater tooth contact. Nowadays the wax is water soluble and will not coat the tooth surface.

Dental floss should be used at least once a day for two to three minutes. It is important to be consistent, starting in the same place and working your way around the dental arch so as not to miss any spots.

For individuals who have fixed restorations, floss threaders may be used to get the floss under the contacts of the bridge. Pre-threaded floss holders are available for people who lack dexterity or for those caregivers who are flossing someone else's teeth. While there are many types of interdental cleaners, dental floss remains the best choice for relatively healthy mouths.

If you need some help with your flossing technique, ask your dental hygienist at your next visit. Depending on the condition of your mouth, he or she may suggest additional home care ideas.