

# Oral Health Tips

## Protecting Your Teeth Through Proper Brushing and Flossing

Learning and practicing proper brushing and flossing techniques is an essential part of maintaining good oral health and preventing tooth decay and periodontal disease (gum and bone disease).

### Brushing Technique

Toothbrushing is one of the most effective ways to help remove decay-causing plaque from tooth surfaces.

- Each tooth has five surfaces (top or chewing surface and four sides) that need to be cleaned.
- Many people overestimate the amount of time they brush their teeth. At least two minutes is recommended, but in reality most people brush for 30 seconds or less. Some electric toothbrushes come with a built in timer.
- Place a soft bristle brush at a 45-degree angle to the tooth and use a gentle massaging action in small circular strokes.
- Brush the outer and inner surfaces of the tooth, including close to the gumline.
- Use the front tip or "toe" of the brush for the inner front tooth surfaces.
- Teeth are covered by a fairly thin layer of enamel that can be worn down by too-vigorous scrubbing. Apply light pressure as you brush.
- Ideally toothbrushing should be done after every meal, but it is most important before bedtime.
- Do not share your toothbrush, it can spread germs.
- Always use fluoride toothpaste.

Brushing is also one of the most effective ways to deliver decay-preventing fluoride to your teeth.

### Flossing Technique

Brushing alone isn't enough to remove plaque from the tooth surface. Flossing your teeth cleans areas between the teeth and cleans the sides of the teeth where the toothbrush can't reach. The space between your teeth (interproximal areas) and below the gumline are two common

areas where plaque builds up and the toothbrush cannot reach. If the plaque is not removed the teeth become more susceptible to tooth decay (cavities).

### How To Floss:

- Use about 18 inches of floss, winding most of it around your index finger and the rest around the index finger of your other hand. This finger takes up the used floss.
- Gently guide about an inch of floss between your teeth using your thumbs and index fingers.
- Hold floss tightly against the tooth and use a gentle up and down rubbing motion to clean between teeth. Be careful because the gums can be bruised if floss is "snapped" into place.
- At the gumline, curve floss into a C-shape against sides of both teeth and move it up and down.
- Repeat for all teeth and the back of the last teeth.

### Additional Flossing Tips

- Be gentle when inserting under the gumline. Flossing can injure your gums if done too aggressively or improperly.
- Gum tissue may bleed and be sore for the first few days. Bleeding should stop once all the bacteria are removed.
- Parents should supervise their children's flossing until they can demonstrate the manual hand dexterity to do it on their own. Many children cannot floss properly until about the age of 10.

Source: American Dental Association [www.ada.org](http://www.ada.org)

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