



AUSTRALIAN DENTAL  
ASSOCIATION

## Flossing

# Why it's essential for your oral health

Here's something you may not know - nearly half the surface area of your teeth lies between them.

And no, we're not telling you this so you can ace your next trivia night.

The fact is, if you're relying solely on brushing you're not effectively cleaning a large portion of your teeth; so, flossing should be an essential part of your oral care routine and not an optional extra.

By using floss to remove the plaque from between your teeth, you're helping to prevent gum disease, tooth decay, and halitosis (otherwise known as "bad breath"). That's a lot of upside for just a couple of minutes spent each day flossing between your teeth.

### Make it a part of your routine

It's always best to floss when you're not in a rush or when you're too tired to do it justice. At the end of the day, if you're too tired you might benefit from flossing first thing in the morning or after lunch. Or if you like to go to bed with a clean mouth then floss before your nightly brush. If you have kids, they should begin flossing as soon as they have two teeth in contact. You should help them until they are about the eight years old as they won't have the dexterity to floss properly.

### How to floss

It's one thing to make flossing a part of your dental health care routine, quite another to do it properly. Your dentist will be able to instruct you on the correct flossing technique which should involve the following basic steps:

1. Wind approximately 45 cm of floss around your middle fingers and grip it tightly between your thumbs and index fingers.
2. Keeping the thumb and index close together, gently guide the floss between the teeth, taking care not to cut or damage your gums with abrupt movement. You should use a side-to-side motion to ensure the sides of both teeth are cleaned equally.
3. To clean the "neck" of the tooth, which is the point where it meets the gums, curl the floss and insert it gently under the gum.

If you find this technique too difficult, consider using a floss threader (a nylon loop through which you thread the floss) or floss pick (the floss is held taut between two prongs on a handle) to do the job.

Your dentist can also demonstrate correct flossing techniques.

### Flossing extras

Your dentist may also recommend using the following items to complement your flossing regimen:

**Interdental cleaners** - Resembling bottle brushes and available in a range of different widths, these cleaners are often more suitable to use than floss if you have large gaps between your teeth. They're also a great option if you have braces, missing teeth or gum disease. Your dentist can advise the correct size to use.

**Irrigators** - These are electrical devices that use a steady stream of water to remove plaque and food debris from between your teeth and below your gum line.

**Interdental tips** - Flexible rubber tips that run gently along the gum line to clean away plaque and food from between your teeth and below your gum line.

Always speak to your dentist before using any type of interdental aid because if used incorrectly they can damage your gums.

### But I have braces!

If you have braces, a bridge, or implants it is extremely important to floss correctly and regularly. You may need to use a greater floss width, incorporate interdental cleaners into your flossing routine, or use a floss threader to reach difficult areas around braces or bridges. Your dentist will demonstrate the correct flossing technique and discuss the best options for your situation.

### 3 THINGS THAT MAKES FLOSSING EASIER

1. **Learn the correct technique** - A dental professional can teach you the right technique so you can floss efficiently from the word go.
2. **Use a floss threader** - Ideal if you have braces or a bridge, these are loops of fibre that thread floss into small places around your teeth.
3. **Use a floss pick** - Made up of two prongs with dental floss strung between them, they're perfect if you struggle with traditional flossing techniques

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