



Penn Dental
FAMILY PRACTICE

A No-Nonsense Guide to Flossing:

How To Conquer This Important Daily Habit

A Penn Dental Family Practice Ebook

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"I need you to floss more."

Everyone hears it from their hygienist over and over again, and I'm sure everyone thinks, "After I leave today, I'm going to keep up with it." We all start flossing right before our appointment, and we all do it for a week or possibly two after our hygiene appointments. But, somewhere we fall off the flossing wagon.

Preventing Gingivitis

What we don't realize, is flossing is an important part of keeping our mouths healthy. Flossing does more than remove food particles from between our teeth. Removing food from between the teeth is important; however, flossing helps maintain the oral bacterial flora in balance. The bacteria under the gum are anaerobic spirochetes and rods that cause the body to respond with inflammation. Inflammation in the mouth presents itself as puffy, red, and bleeding gums—otherwise known as gingivitis.

At this stage gingivitis is completely reversible. Once gingivitis infects the bone it is periodontal disease and is no longer reversible!

Your dental professionals may be able to keep the bone loss stable and from continuing, but you cannot grow the bone back. Surgical intervention may restore lost bone, but it will be an extensive treatment process.

To help control the bacteria in the mouth, you have to actually get the floss under the gum, alongside the tooth. If the space is big enough, your hygienist may recommend a different tool to use between the teeth, but that won't get under the gum. Your hygienist will be happy to demonstrate proper flossing technique with you at your appointment.



Halting Cavities

Flossing also helps keep cavities from forming between the teeth. Most cavities in the mouth start to form in areas that are difficult to access with just a toothbrush. Brushing is fantastic for the tooth surfaces towards the lips and cheeks, and the sides towards the tongue and roof of the mouth. A toothbrush won't fit between the teeth and that's where flossing comes in. Flossing gets between the teeth to clean the side that is adjacent to the other teeth. Most cavities start in this area and are difficult to detect without x-rays.

A Flossing Tip: Some of us may think that flossing makes our gums bleed. When you start flossing you will see more bleeding and this is Ok. It's a symptom of the inflammation already present in your mouth. If you continue to floss, little by little, you'll notice the bleeding begins to slow and eventually will stop. The same with any discomfort you may feel in your gums.

Flossing is exercise for the gums. It helps to get our gums healthy and is one of the simplest ways to start a fitness program!

Maintaining Dental Health

Flossing helps maintain the dental work we've already had completed in our mouths. When we have crowns (caps), fillings (silver and tooth colored), or bridges present we need to maintain it. These restorations help return the function to the teeth and keep the teeth from causing further problems for us. How long we keep these restorations intact depends on how well we care for them.

Flossing helps keep the gum and the tooth healthy by removing bacterial plaque that may cause teeth to re-decay or gums to recede exposing more tooth structure that is susceptible to decay.



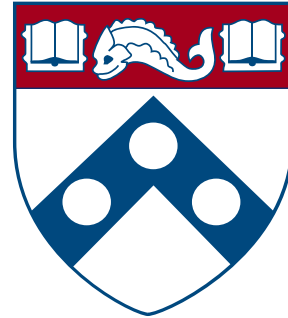
Recommendations

Floss comes in a variety of forms. There is tape, waxed, floss pics and, my personal favorite, Glide. I like Glide floss because it breaks instead of fraying in the tight spots. **But, whichever floss you use the important thing is to floss consistently!** Floss pics are great to get you started with a healthy habit, but generally can't get to the base of the pocket that is formed between the gum, tooth, and bone. If you have a hard time handling regular floss, floss picks or a floss holder are a great alternative.

Flossing bridgework may require a little more patience. It's very easy to want to skip flossing the bridgework some of us have in our mouths; however, it's important to take care of this type of restoration. Food particles may get stuck under the bridge and cause discomfort or re-decay the teeth under the bridgework. All the time and money spent on replacing these teeth would need to be done again! Super-floss and floss threaders work fabulously for these restorations. Braces also require super-floss and floss threaders in order to keep the teeth and gums healthy.

Water-Piks and air-flossers are fantastic alternatives to flossing for you or someone you know that has limited mobility. It can be difficult for some people to wrap the floss around their fingers and maneuver it properly in the mouth. These flossing alternatives can help maintain our oral health.

So when you think, "I'm too tired to floss," remember that you can floss anytime! It doesn't have to be at night before bed. The important thing is to get into the habit of flossing to keep your mouth healthy because we at Penn Dental Family Practice really do believe that you need to floss more. Ultimately, when you experience the benefits of flossing for yourself, you'll love your hygienist for pushing you to keep your new fitness routine!



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