



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 have the time and energy to do it properly. So, if you're a morning person, you might benefit from flossing at the start of your day or after lunch. Or if you're a night owl, then you might like to floss before going to bed. The key thing is to floss at least once a day. 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 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 dentist 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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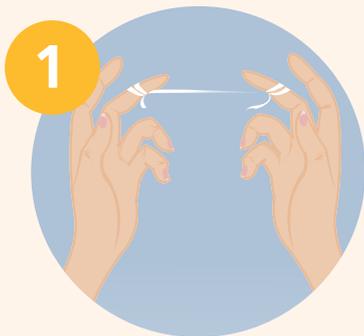


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# Cleaning between your teeth

## Floss & Interdental brushes

### Dental floss



Take about 45 cm of dental floss and wrap most of it around your left middle finger.

Wind the remaining floss around your right middle finger.

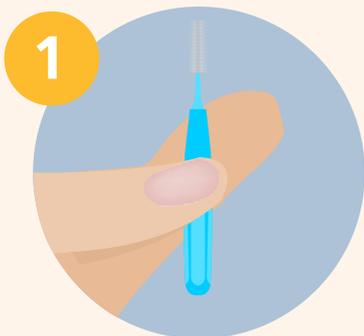


Grip the floss between your thumbs and index fingers then gently slide it between two teeth, using a saw-like motion. Gently slide the floss up and down against the teeth and down each side of the pink triangle of gum between the teeth.

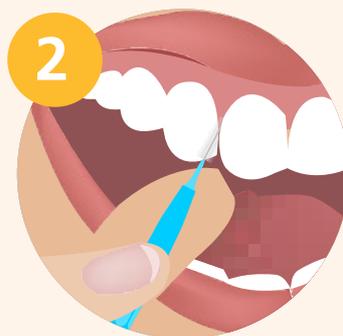


Gently remove the floss from the teeth. Wind a little bit of the floss from your left finger to your right finger to move along the dirty part and to give you a fresh area of floss to clean the next two teeth with. Repeat this wherever two teeth are touching.

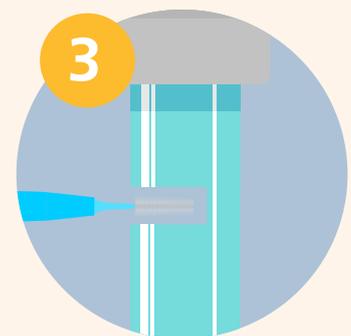
### Interdental brush technique



Choose the correct size interdental brush. Hold the interdental brush firmly between your thumb and index finger.



Place in-between the teeth gaps and gently brush in and out a few times between each tooth.



Rinse the brush under tap water after use and put the cover back on.

- Flossing can be a bit fiddly and at first it might make your gums bleed a little. But as the health of your mouth improves with daily flossing, this will stop (usually within a week). People with braces or gaps between their teeth may find interdental brushes may be easier to use.
- If you're flossing your child's teeth lean their head back into your lap so you can see into their mouth. Or they can stand in front of you and tip their head back against your chest.
- Never force the interdental brush between the teeth gaps. If you're unsure, your dentist can advise which size is best for you. Ask your dentist for tailored guidance on oral hygiene techniques & aids to suit your mouth.

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