

To Floss Or Not To Floss

There Is No Question!

Written by Dr. Warren C. Edwards.

Flossing is an underrated health-promoting activity. Brushing teeth properly and consistently helps to remove most dental plaque, however, brushing alone cannot remove plaque that is located in places that a toothbrush cannot reach, particularly in between teeth and under the gums. In addition to removing plaque, flossing also helps to remove debris that adheres to teeth and gums in between teeth. It polishes surfaces and helps control bad breath. To do it well takes two to three minutes each day.

Not flossing increases the likelihood of periodontal (gum) disease. It has been documented that patients with periodontal disease are one and one half to two times more likely to suffer a fatal heart attack and 3 times more likely to suffer a stroke. Diabetic patients with severe periodontal disease have trouble maintaining correct blood sugar levels. Oral tissues infected with the pneumonia bacteria may be inhaled into the lungs, where immune defenses fail to wipe them out. Patients with artificial joints or heart valves have an increased risk of suffering a serious infection when periodontal bacteria enter the bloodstream. Mothers of premature babies may be 7 times more likely to show signs of periodontal disease than mothers whose babies are normal weight at birth.

The consequences are significant for the lack of a three-minute daily activity. The price is nominal, about three and a half cents (floss averages seven cents a yard, and you use approximately half a yard each time). The choices are many. Not too many years ago there was just 'floss'; now it comes wide, thin, slick, flavored, unflavored, waxed or unwaxed.

The most common method of flossing is to cut of a piece of floss that is 18-20 inches in length. Lightly wrap each side of the floss several times around each middle finger. Next, carefully maneuver the floss in between the teeth with your index fingers and thumbs in an up and down, not side to side motion. It is best to bring the floss up and down making sure to go below the gum line, forming a "C" on the side of each tooth. Do this to each tooth in your mouth.

For those who are just learning, children, or people who do not have the use of both hands, there are prethreaded floss holders. Your dental professional can assist you in learning the proper technique. Irrigating devices, such as waterpiks, or electric toothbrushes, are not a substitute for flossing. You need to do both.

Try a few varieties of floss to find the type that you like. Don't worry about wasting the floss if you don't like it or it doesn't work for you. You can use it to hang piñatas or Christmas ornaments. It is great for stringing beaded necklaces, and unflavored varieties can be used for slicing goat cheese, mozzarella, cheesecake, and refrigerated cookie dough. In a pinch, you can use it to sew a button, and it works better than thread for sewing tough items like backpacks. You

can even use unwaxed floss to truss a turkey and the mint-flavored floss is great for staking up garden plants (some insects don't like mint).

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