

ORAL HEALTH MONTH

Dr. Abby Degaust
Ask your dentist

Q: Do I really need to floss my teeth everyday?

A: When you eat, leftover food mixes with the saliva and bacteria in your mouth to form plaque. This filmy substance coats your teeth and gums, which puts your teeth and gums in direct contact with bacterial acid and this can lead to tooth decay and gum disease. Your toothbrush can only remove about two thirds of the plaque on your teeth and gums and then you need to floss to remove the rest. Plaque is the main cause of gum disease. Within 24 to 36 hours the plaque hardens and calculus forms, which can only be removed professionally by a dentist or dental hygienist. Flossing once a day prevents the plaque from hardening and turning into calculus. Getting into the habit of flossing daily is easier if you do it in combination with another activity like watching TV or listening to music. Another tip is to leave the floss out in an obvious location to serve as a reminder like on your night stand or bathroom counter.

There is a proper technique when it comes to flossing. You want to take a length of floss long enough to wrap around both your middle fingers with about 1 to 2 inches of floss between your hands. Then hold the floss taut with your thumbs and index fingers and slide the floss between two teeth and wrap it into a "C" shape around the base of each of the two teeth and gently under the gumline. Wipe each tooth form base to tip two or three times. Continue this process throughout the entire mouth. Be sure to floss both sides of every tooth and don't forget the backs of your last molars. Use a new section of the floss as it wears and picks up debris. After you are done flossing throw it in the garbage. Never flush floss down the toilet.

When you first start flossing it is normal for your gums to bleed. The bleeding will stop after consistently flossing for a few days. If the bleeding doesn't stop, please see your dentist. Also see your dentist if the floss is shredding or catching on a filling or edge of a tooth, as this could indicate an issue that needs to be addressed.



Dr. Abby Degaust (BSc. Biochemistry, DDS)

owns the Family Dental Centre in Fredericton, NB and is the president of the Fredericton Dental Society. Her opinions are expressed in this newspaper and are published for education and informational purposes only and are not intended as diagnosis, treatment or as a substitute for professional dental care or advice.



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