



# Flossing: 101

Read some important do's and don'ts when it comes to flossing.

## A Job for Floss

If you're like many Americans, you may not be flossing enough or not at all. A tooth has 5 surfaces. The toothbrush can effectively clean three of these surfaces. The tongue side of the tooth, the cheek side of the tooth, and the biting surface can easily be reached by simple tooth brushing. The correct action of the toothbrush, whether electric or manual, cannot reach into the spaces between the teeth.

That's a job for floss! When you are flossing it is not just to remove pieces of food stuck between your teeth - that's a bonus - we're actually flossing to remove the film that is created by bacteria before it develops into plaque. Plaque is the technical term used to describe growing bacteria.

Eventually this plaque will harden into a white chalky coating on your teeth called tartar. This newly formed tartar has a very rough surface that allows more bacteria to grow on which in turn can lead to bleeding gums and the breakdown of bone and gum tissues. This is the beginning of periodontal disease.

Here are some flossing do's and don'ts:

### DO

- Do use commercial floss
  - Waxed or unwaxed, thin or thick, it doesn't matter
- Do use enough floss
  - Eighteen inches is just about right for the average adult to floss under the gum line
    - Bacteria live about 3 millimeters below the gum line, which is how far down the floss should go when used correctly
- Do use a gentle rubbing motion to floss every day
  - It takes about 24 hours for bacteria to build up on your teeth again after flossing
  - By flossing every 24 hours, you will reduce the bacterial build-up



### Why Floss?

Flossing is an important part of one's oral hygiene routine. Flossing is not just the mere action of trying to remove food remnants from between your teeth, but is designed to dislodge the bacteria that has begun to colonize in areas that your toothbrush is unable to reach.

### DON'T

- Don't use thread or yarn
  - Thread can cut your gums and yarn can leave residue
- Don't substitute floss with a proxy brush
  - Proxy brushes or interdental cleaners are shaped like little Christmas trees
  - They're good for going between the teeth and around braces, but they won't get under the gum line.
- Don't reuse floss
  - This can spread bacteria in your mouth
- Finally, don't worry if you floss before or after you brush, as both are equally effective



For more oral health information, please visit our website at [www.bcbsfedental.com](http://www.bcbsfedental.com).



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