

Brushing and flossing

Regular toothbrushing and flossing help protect your teeth from decay and gum disease. This fact sheet explains the most effective way to brush and floss your teeth.

Toothbrushing

To remove dental plaque, teeth should be brushed at least twice a day (in the morning after breakfast and just before bed). Use a soft bristled toothbrush with a small head, and a fluoride toothpaste.

Toothbrushes (or brush heads on electric toothbrushes) should be replaced every three months and/or when the toothbrush bristles appear worn and shaggy.

Manual toothbrushing technique:

1. Place the head of the toothbrush at a 45 degree angle to the gum margin.
2. Gently move the toothbrush in a small circular, forward and backward, jiggling or vibrating motion over each tooth to remove plaque found both above and below the gum line.
3. Repeat this process on both the inner and outer surfaces of each tooth.
4. Clean the chewing surfaces by using a gentle backward and forward scrubbing action.

Top insides



Bottom insides



Outsides



Chewing surfaces



Electric toothbrushing technique:

1. Place the head of the brush against each tooth at the gum margin. Clean the outside and inside surfaces of all teeth by moving the brush in a gentle, rolling motion.
2. Clean the chewing surface of all teeth by holding the head of the brush to each chewing surface.

Modified toothbrushes

If you have limited manual dexterity, using an electric toothbrush or modifying the handle of a manual toothbrush may provide an easier grip and improved control. Modifications can include bending or extending the handle, increasing the size or weight of the handle, and/or attaching ergonomic handles to the brush. For advice on modified toothbrushes, consult an occupational therapist.

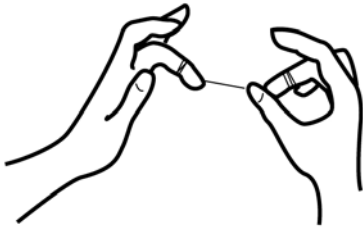
Flossing

Floss your teeth once a day, prior to brushing. When flossing, take care not to damage your gums.

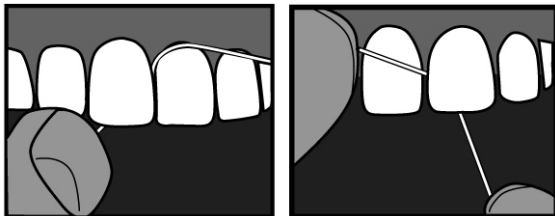
Flossing may be difficult at first, however, with practice, becomes easy. If you are unsure which type of dental floss to use, consult with your dental professional.

Flossing technique:

1. Take about 40cm of floss and wrap the ends around the second finger of each hand, leaving only a small piece between the two hands.



2. With one of the fingers in the mouth, draw the floss down into the gap between two teeth using a gentle see-sawing action until it slips just slightly under the gum level.



3. Wrap the floss around one tooth and use a wiping action to remove plaque and food debris.

4. Re-insert a clean section of floss between the same two teeth.
5. Wrap the floss around the other tooth and wipe the side of that tooth.
6. Repeat these steps around the mouth until the spaces between all teeth have been cleaned.

Alternatives to dental floss

If required, dental floss can be replaced with floss aids and interdental/interproximal brushes.

Interdental or interproximal brushes resemble very small bottlebrushes and are designed to clean the spaces between teeth. These tiny brushes are also ideal for cleaning under bridge work, around crowns and between the roots of teeth where gum recession has occurred.

Interdental/interproximal brushing technique:

Simply slide the brush into the space and move the brush back and forth until the area is clean.

For advice on alternatives to dental floss and interdental/interproximal cleaning techniques, consult with your dental professional.

For more information

- Contact your dental professional
- Visit www.health.qld.gov.au/oralhealth
- Call 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84) for confidential health advice 24 hours a day, seven days a week
- Email oral_health@health.qld.gov.au.

© The State of Queensland, Queensland Health, 2008.