

## ADA Healthy Smile Tips

- Brush your teeth twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste.
- Clean between your teeth once a day.
- Eat a healthy diet and limit snacks.
- Visit your dentist regularly.

For more information about taking care of your mouth and teeth, visit [MouthHealthy.org](http://MouthHealthy.org), the ADA's website just for patients.



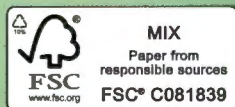
# Taking Care of Your Teeth And Gums



## W135

To order additional copies, call 800.947.4746 or visit [adacatalog.org](http://adacatalog.org)

©2015 American Dental Association  
All rights reserved.



**ADA American Dental Association®**  
America's leading advocate for oral health

## There are so many dental products. How do I know what works best?

- **Choose products with the American Dental Association Seal of Acceptance.**

The ADA Seal on a product is your assurance that it has met ADA standards for safety and effectiveness. Look for the ADA Seal on fluoride toothpaste, toothbrushes, floss, interdental cleaners, and mouthrinse.



- **Look for a toothpaste with fluoride.**

Fluoride helps keep tooth enamel strong and can aid in repairing the early stages of decay. If you have sensitive teeth, your dentist may suggest using special toothpaste.

- **Select a toothbrush with soft bristles that feels comfortable in your hand and in your mouth, and use it twice a day.** All ADA-accepted toothbrushes — manual or powered — earned the ADA Seal because they can remove plaque above the gum line and reduce gingivitis. For children, choose a child-sized toothbrush.

- **Replace your toothbrush every three or four months, or sooner if the bristles become frayed.** A worn toothbrush won't clean your teeth properly. Children's toothbrushes often need replacing more frequently because they can wear out sooner. If you have hand, arm, or shoulder problems that limit movement, you may find a powered toothbrush easier to use.

- **Oral irrigating devices use a stream of water to remove food particles around the teeth.** They can be helpful for people who wear braces or dentures. However, an oral irrigator is meant to enhance, not replace, regular brushing and flossing.

- **Check mouthrinse labels closely.** Some mouthrinses just have a pleasant taste; others actually kill germs and reduce plaque. Some also have fluoride. If you are constantly using a breath freshener for bad breath, see your dentist. In some cases, bad breath may be a sign of poor health.

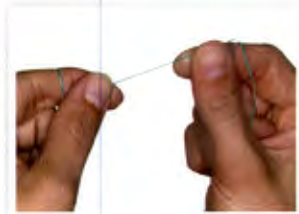
- **Ask your dentist or hygienist for product tips.** People's needs may differ, and your dental team can point you to products for your specific needs.



## Why do I need to clean between my teeth?

There are several ways to clean between your teeth and flossing is the most common. Flossing removes plaque and food particles from between teeth and under the gum line. Your dentist or hygienist can show you the right way to floss. It may feel clumsy at first, but don't give up! It takes time to get the hang of it. The following suggestions may help:

**FLOSS**  
EVERY DAY



1. Break off about 18 inches of floss and wind most of it around your middle or index finger. Wind the rest of the floss around a finger of the other hand. This finger will take up the used floss.



2. Hold the floss tightly between your thumbs and forefingers. Guide the floss between your teeth, using a gentle rubbing motion. To avoid hurting your gums, never snap the floss into gum tissue.



3. When the floss reaches the gum line, curve it into a C shape against one tooth. Gently slide it into the space between the gum and the tooth.



4. Hold the floss tightly against the tooth. Gently rub the side of the tooth, moving the floss away from the gum with up and down motions.



5. Repeat this method on the rest of your teeth. As you move from tooth to tooth, unwind the clean floss with one finger and take up the used floss with the finger on the other hand. Do not forget the back side of the last tooth.

If you haven't been flossing, you may experience sore or bleeding gums for the first five or so days that you floss. This should stop once the plaque is broken up and the bacteria are removed. If bleeding does not stop, see your dentist.

## Flossing alternatives

If you have trouble handling floss, you may wish to try some other ways to clean between your teeth. There are a number of products, known as interdental cleaners that you can use. These include water flossers, pre-threaded flossers, tiny brushes and wooden plaque removers. Talk with your dentist or hygienist about which product may be most helpful to you.



Sometimes children as young as five can use floss aids.

*Even if you brush twice a day, there are places your toothbrush bristles can't reach. Flossing removes plaque and food particles from between teeth and under the gum line.*

## What causes tooth decay and gum disease?

Your teeth are covered with a sticky film of bacteria called **plaque** (sounds like PLAK). After a meal or snack, these bacteria convert the sugar in foods into acids. These acids attack the enamel, the tooth's hard outer layer. Plaque can also build up overnight while you are sleeping. Repeated attacks can cause the enamel to break down and lead to cavities.

Your saliva reduces plaque by cleansing the mouth and helping to digest food while you chew. But, if there is not enough saliva, the number of bacteria in your mouth will increase along with the amount of acid they produce. This lack of saliva flow is called "**dry mouth**" and can be caused by certain medications or chronic diseases, such as diabetes. Dry mouth may increase your risk of tooth decay.

If you brush twice a day and floss once a day, you can remove most of the harmful plaque and bacteria. But if plaque stays on the teeth, it will eventually harden into tartar. **Tartar** can build up near the gum line. Since tartar is more difficult to brush or floss away, it gives the bacteria a place to grow without being disturbed.

Plaque that is not removed can also irritate and inflame your gums, making them swell or bleed. This is called gingivitis, the early stage of gum disease. The good news is that gingivitis can be reversed with professional dental cleaning and good oral hygiene at home.

If gum disease is left untreated, it can cause your gums to pull away from the teeth. Pockets or spaces can form between the teeth and gums. These pockets can become infected. In advanced stages of gum disease, bone loss can occur and teeth may become loose, fall out or have to be pulled.

You may prevent both tooth decay and gum disease by always remembering to brush twice a day and floss daily. It is much easier and less expensive to prevent tooth decay and gum disease than to treat them!

## What are some tips for brushing teeth properly?

Brush twice a day for two minutes each time with a fluoride toothpaste to help prevent tooth decay. Fluoride (FLOOR-ide) is a mineral that helps make tooth enamel stronger. It's a good idea to talk with your dentist or hygienist about the best way to brush your teeth.

Here are a few tips to help you start a good routine:

**BRUSH**  
TWO MINUTES  
TWICE A DAY



1. Place the toothbrush against your gum line at a 45-degree angle. This angle makes sure that you are fully reaching the gum line as well as the tooth surface. Move the brush back and forth gently in short, tooth-wide strokes.



2. Brush the outer tooth surfaces, keeping the toothbrush at a 45-degree angle to the gums.



3. Brush the inner tooth surfaces.



4. Brush the chewing surfaces.



5. Use the top part of the brush to clean the inside surface of the top and bottom front teeth. Use a gentle up-and-down motion.



6. Brush your tongue to remove bacteria, which may help freshen your breath.