

# Why flossing is so important

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*You settle into the dental chair anticipating you'll be asked once again, "Are you flossing?" We know it can be frustrating. But if you could see your oral health situation—including what you do at home—through the eyes of your hygienist, you might understand why flossing to keep your teeth free of plaque is a vital step in your daily oral health regimen.*

## What does a hygienist do?

First, hygienists probe your mouth and compare "the numbers" from one visit to the next. Any changes in depth from the gum to where the bone attaches the teeth tell how well you are brushing and flossing at home. In addition to reporting any bone loss or



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"periodontal disease," the hygienist determines and documents signs of gum infection or "gingivitis." He or she will then make a determination of the potential for future breakdown in your oral tissues, including teeth, bone and gums. These examinations give us a pretty clear picture of your commitment to homecare since your last visit. If dental disease is present, the most common reasons are insufficient or ineffective use of dental products.

## What should I do at home?

Your number one goal for taking care of your teeth at home should be controlling plaque.<sup>1</sup>

Plaque is considered a "biofilm,"<sup>2</sup> or, in other words, a coating that develops naturally when bacteria congregate on the tooth surface and in between the teeth. The most reliable way to prevent dental problems associated with plaque is to remove biofilm from your teeth every day by cleaning all your teeth, gums, and your tongue. Brushing alone does not clean between the teeth, so cleaning aids, including dental floss, must be used.

You can show your hygienist how you brush and floss and discuss your basic homecare regimen. Then he or she can help you determine what you're doing properly and what you need to work on.

## What products should I use?

Your hygienist will consider the arrangement and spacing of your teeth in order to select the best dental products for you. Some products may be as effective as floss for removal of plaque.<sup>3</sup> Your hygienist can evaluate your situation and recommend products as indicated. A hygienist assesses, "What type of floss is better for this patient? Should an antimicrobial rinse be recommended? Would a small interdental toothbrush help? What type of toothpaste will give this patient the most protection? Should fluoride products or specific types of chewing gums be suggested? What would this patient prefer to use?"

## Never again hear, "Are you flossing?"

Oral health improves when you control plaque, resulting in fewer restorative dental procedures. Understanding why a hygienist asks about your flossing habits may help you make changes in your home care practices. **Doing these things well and doing them consistently can result in a lifetime of excellent dental health.**

## References

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**Goal #1:  
control  
plaque  
for oral  
health**

