

The Next Exciting Topic: Flossing!

I am sitting here trying to figure out how to make this article hold your interest. Flossing. Hmm. Let's face it, you will never see this article as one of Oprah's Book Club picks, or see *Flossing: The Major Motion Picture!* There are definitely more exciting things to write about, but this is important! Bear with me and I promise you will learn something that might improve your life.

Do you actually floss? I mean more than just right before your dental cleaning when you're afraid you'll get a lecture? Very few of us floss as recommended. In fact, less than 10% of Americans floss on a regular basis. Just seems like a hassle, huh? Well, did you know flossing could affect how long you live?

Brushing your teeth, like we discussed in my last article, cleans the tops, fronts, and backs of your teeth, but it can't do anything about the sides of the teeth where brush bristles can't reach. Flossing is the only way to remove bacteria and food debris from the sides of your teeth and under your gums. If you don't get these areas clean, the bacteria left behind can cause tooth decay, bone loss, and inflammation in the form of gum disease. When your gums are inflamed, every time you eat or brush your teeth your gums bleed and you get the bacteria in your blood stream. This greatly increases your risk of having a heart attack or a stroke. It also makes your blood sugar hard to regulate if you are diabetic and increases the risk of premature birth if you are pregnant. Keeping the bacteria cleaned out helps keep your teeth and your body healthy!

Some people tell me they avoid flossing because it makes their gums sore or bleed. This just means their gums are inflamed and really NEED to be flossed! Expect a little bleeding when you start flossing. It's normal! The more you do it, the tougher and

healthier your gums become. Once you get rid of the inflammation your gums won't bleed or be sore anymore!

So how do you do it properly? First, you need to pick your floss. Floss comes in waxed and unwaxed, braided and monofilament. Waxed means it slips between your teeth better, while unwaxed "squeaks" when the tooth is clean. Monofilament is a little more expensive, but it won't shred or break as easily. I personally like monofilament flosses like Glide or Satin Floss. Exciting stuff, huh? I told you!

Next, break off about 18 inches of floss and wind most of it around the middle finger of one hand and the rest around the other middle finger. Pinch floss between thumbs and index fingers, leaving a 1"-2" length in between. Use thumbs to direct floss between upper teeth and index fingers to guide floss between contacts of the lower teeth. Guide it between two teeth, but try not to "snap" the floss through the contact. A sawing motion passes it through the space easily and keeps you from damaging your gums.

Contrary to popular opinion, flossing is not just a way to remove food that is stuck in the spaces between your teeth. In fact, you shouldn't be focusing on cleaning the spaces and should instead think about cleaning the sides of the teeth themselves. Once the floss is between your teeth, wrap the floss around one of the teeth to make a "C" shape and wipe up and down the side of the tooth, extending down under the gumline.

Before pulling the floss from between these teeth, you can then move on to the other tooth sharing that space and wrap the floss around it. Wrap the floss around it and clean off the side of that tooth. So, for every space between teeth, you need to do two separate motions, focusing on the sides of the individual teeth sharing the space. Repeat the process for all your teeth, including the back side of your last teeth. Change to a different, clean part of

the floss as you go along to avoid just moving bacteria from one spot to another. Flossing daily will greatly increase your oral health and decrease your chances of heart problems.

Wow! You just made it to the end of an article about *flossing your teeth*. Either you are pretty bored or you are truly concerned about taking care of yourself! I hope it's the latter. Maybe next time I will write about skydiving or bungee jumping...

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