

How to Brush and Floss for a Healthy Smile

Brushing

Brushing for two-to-three minutes after each meal — or at least twice a day — is your best defense against dental decay and disease. This damage is caused by your teeth's most persistent enemy, plaque, a sticky film of harmful bacteria that is brought on by sugary and acidic foods. Correct brushing is essential to maintain your oral health. Here's how:

Brushing Techniques

1. The head of your toothbrush should be placed beside the teeth and the tips of the bristles placed at a 45 degree angle to the gum line.
2. Move the toothbrush back and forth, using short circular strokes and a scrubbing motion, several times in each spot.
3. Keep the bristles angled against the gum line, while you brush both the inner and outer surfaces of each tooth. Brush the chewing surfaces straight on.
4. Clean the inside of the surfaces of the front teeth by tilting the brush vertically and making several up-and-down strokes with the front of the brush.
5. Finish by brushing your tongue, which helps remove bacteria from your mouth.
6. Rinse vigorously with water or a fluoride mouthwash to remove loosened plaque.

Brushing Tips

- Brush your teeth gently, applying just enough pressure to feel the bristles against the gums and between the teeth. If you are squashing the bristles, you're brushing too hard.
- Avoid toothbrushes with hard bristles, which can damage your gums. Use a toothbrush with soft, round-ended bristles.
- Replace your toothbrush approximately every three months or as soon as the bristles are worn or bent. A worn-out toothbrush does not clean your teeth properly, and may actually injure your gums. You should also replace your toothbrush after you've had a cold.
- Be sure you are reaching every tooth by watching in the mirror. The toothbrush can clean only one or two teeth at a time, so you should be moving the toothbrush around frequently to cover all surfaces.
- Use a toothpaste that contains fluoride, which helps strengthen tooth enamel. Rinsing with a fluoride mouthwash before bed can also help you decrease your chances of developing tooth decay. However, rinses remove only minimal plaque and are no substitute for brushing and flossing.
- Ask your dentist or hygienist if you have any questions.



Flossing

Only flossing can remove plaque from between teeth and below the gum line, where some of the worst decay begins. Make sure to floss at least once a day, preferably before bed, to clean the places where a toothbrush can't reach.

Flossing Techniques

1. Tear off about 18 inches of floss, and wind most of it around one of your middle fingers. Wind the remaining floss around the same finger of the other hand. This finger will take up the floss as it becomes used.
2. Hold the floss tightly (without any slack) between your two hands, with 1/2" to 1" of floss between them. Guide the floss between your teeth using a gentle sawing motion.
3. Gently slide the floss into the space between the gum and teeth until you feel resistance. When the floss reaches the gum line, curve it into a C-shape against the tooth. Do not force or snap the floss.
4. Repeat this technique on all of your teeth, and don't forget the last teeth in back.
5. Rinse vigorously to remove loosened plaque and particles.

Flossing Tips

- Establish a regular pattern for flossing so that you don't miss any teeth.
- As with brushing, flossing should be done gently. Improper flossing can injure your gums.
- If you have not been flossing regularly, your gums may bleed and be sore for the first five or six days. As plaque is broken up and bacteria removed, the bleeding will stop and your gums will heal.
- By age 8, children should be able to floss their own teeth. To make it easier, use a loop of floss. Simply tie the ends of a ten-inch piece of floss, forming a circle. Hold the floss tightly between the thumbs and forefingers, and use the technique above.
- A floss holder can make flossing easier for those who do not have good finger dexterity. Special picks and sticks are also available to help those who find floss difficult to work with. Consult your dentist or hygienist about the best technique for you.

Northeast Delta Dental

www.nedelta.com