



ORAL HYGIENE

Brushing and Flossing "Excuse Busters" to the Rescue

The American Academy of Periodontology challenges the public to quit making excuses for not brushing and flossing by offering the following "excuse busters." A good at-home oral hygiene routine will help ensure a beautiful smile, prevent periodontal disease – a major cause of tooth loss in adults, and guarantee a lifetime of smiles.

- 1. My hands are too big and I have no dexterity.** If dexterity problems are the excuse, a power floss holder or automatic tooth brush may solve this problem.
- 2. Floss pushes food further into the pocket.** Not only does floss loosen food in between teeth, but its primary function is to remove the invisible film of bacteria that constantly forms between teeth. Floss cleans about 30 percent of the tooth's surfaces in places that the toothbrush cannot always reach.
- 3. When I floss, my gums bleed.**



Floss does not cause your gums to bleed, but not flossing daily could. That's because flossing may help prevent gingivitis, the mildest form of periodontal disease. Gingivitis causes the gums to redden, swell and bleed easily. Gingivitis is often caused by inadequate oral hygiene and can be reversible with professional treatment and good oral home care.

- 4. My teeth are cleaned professionally twice a year, so I don't have to brush and floss.** It's important to get your teeth cleaned and examined twice a year, but a daily at-home oral hygiene routine is equally as important. When plaque is not removed daily, it can turn into a hard substance called calculus/tartar in less than two days. Daily cleaning helps minimize calculus formation.
- 5. It takes too long.** Thorough

brushing and flossing takes less time than shaving or applying make-up.

- 6. Brushing and flossing gets in the way of family time.** Actually not brushing and flossing can take away from family time. Research suggests that periodontal diseases can pass through saliva, common contact of saliva through family time such as kissing may put your loved ones at an increased risk for contracting periodontal diseases, and more trips to the dentist.
- 7. Losing teeth is part of aging anyway, so brushing and flossing won't help.** The image of grandparents' teeth in a glass is an image of yesteryear. More people are keeping their natural teeth longer with brushing and flossing.
- 8. My teeth are too tight for the floss.** If you have tight spaces between your teeth, polymer floss that's ADA approved may slide in between your teeth easily.
- 9. I damage my gums when I floss.** If the correct technique is being used, gums will not be damaged. Read below for the correct way to brush and floss. Or, if you prefer, ask your dental care provider for a refresher in oral hygiene technique.

How to Brush and Floss

Now that that your brushing and flossing excuses have been "busted," you'll want to make sure you're using the right technique.

Use floss that is 18 inches long. Wind most of the floss around your middle finger and the remainder around a middle finger of the opposite hand. Gently insert the floss between the teeth using a back-and-forth motion, guiding the floss with your forefingers. Guide the floss to the gumline and curve the

floss into a C-shape. Slide it into the space between the gum and tooth until you feel light resistance. Repeat this process between every tooth and don't forget the back sides of your back teeth.

Begin brushing your teeth by cleaning all outside surfaces with your toothbrush at a 45-degree angle where your gums and teeth meet. Gently move the brush in a circular motion several times.

Apply light pressure to get the bristles between the teeth. Use this same method on the inside of the back teeth. When cleaning the inside surfaces of the upper and lower front teeth, hold the brush vertically. Make several gentle back-and-forth strokes over each tooth and its surrounding gum tissue. To clean the biting surfaces, use short gentle strokes. Do not forget to brush your tongue.

The American Academy of Periodontology Patient Page is a public service of the AAP and should not be used as a substitute for the care and advice of your personal periodontist. There may be variations in treatment that your periodontist will recommend based on individual facts and circumstances. Call 1-800-FLOSS-EM for a free brochure on periodontal disease.

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