

# Brushing and flossing

Regular toothbrushing and flossing help protect your teeth from decay and gum disease. This fact sheet explains the most effective way to brush and floss your teeth.

## Toothbrushing

To remove dental plaque, brush your teeth at least twice a day (in the morning and just before bed). Use a soft bristled toothbrush with a small head, and fluoride toothpaste. Toothbrushes (or brush heads on electric toothbrushes) should be replaced every three months and/or when the toothbrush bristles appear worn and shaggy.

## Flossing

Floss your teeth once a day, prior to brushing. When flossing, take care not to damage your gums. Flossing can seem difficult at first, however, with practice, becomes very easy. If you are unsure which type of dental floss to use, check with your dental professional.

## Modified toothbrushes

If you have limited manual dexterity, using an electric toothbrush or modifying the handle of a manual toothbrush may provide an easier grip and improved control. Modifications can include bending or extending the handle, increasing the size or weight of the handle, and/or attaching ergonomic handles to the brush. For advice on modified toothbrushes, consult an occupational therapist.

## Alternatives to dental floss

If required, dental floss can be replaced with floss aids and interdental/interproximal brushes. Interdental or interproximal brushes resemble a very small bottlebrush and are designed to clean the spaces between teeth. These tiny brushes are also ideal for cleaning underneath bridges, around crowns and between the roots of teeth where gum recession has occurred. For advice on alternatives to dental floss, consult an occupational therapist.

## Practical Advice

Manual toothbrushing technique:

- Place the head of the toothbrush at a 45 degree angle to the gum margin.
- Gently move the toothbrush in a small circular, forward and backward, jiggling or vibrating motion over each tooth to remove plaque found both above and the below the gum line.
- Repeat this process on both the inner and outer surfaces of each tooth.
- Clean the chewing surfaces by using a backward and forward scrubbing action.

Electric toothbrushing technique:

Place the head of the brush against the tooth at the gum margin and move it in a gentle, rolling motion.

Flossing technique:

- Take about 40cm of floss and wrap the ends around the second finger of each hand, leaving only a small piece between the two hands.
- With one of the fingers in the mouth, draw the floss down into the gap between two teeth using a gentle see-sawing action until it slips just slightly under the gum level.
- Wrap the floss around one side of the tooth and use a wiping action to remove plaque and food debris.
- Re-insert a clean section of floss between the same two teeth.
- Wrap the floss around the other tooth and wipe the side of that tooth.
- Repeat these steps around the mouth until the spaces between all teeth have been cleaned.

Interdental/interproximal brushing technique:

Simply slide the brush into the space and move the brush back and forth until the area is clean.

## Other Resources

For more information:

- contact your dental professional
- call 13 HEALTH (13 42 25 84) for confidential health advice 24 hours a day, seven days a week
- visit the [Queensland Health Oral Health website](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/oralhealth/) (<http://www.health.qld.gov.au/oralhealth/>)

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