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Chew on this! Read **Gum Problem Basics**, a top article on the Oral Health channel.

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YOUR SMILE

First String

FLOSSING IS AS IMPORTANT AS BRUSHING. HERE'S HOW TO GET INTO THE GROOVE

By Shelley Levitt

It's a simple piece of string, sometimes flavored, often waxed. Wrap 18 inches or so around your finger, and you have a powerful tool for not only avoiding cavities but also giving your overall health a big boost.

Dental floss dislodges food particles trapped between the teeth and

Bedtime, rather than the morning, is the better choice for once-a-day flossers.

under the gums where toothbrushes can't reach. Left unchecked, the resulting bacterial load can lead to cavities, bad breath, and gum or periodontal disease.

If that's not scary enough, Jyoti Srivastava, DDS, a New York City prosthodontist (a dentist with advanced training in tooth replacement and restoration), points out that "gum disease is an inflammatory disorder that can contribute to major problems throughout the body." Recent studies suggest links between periodontal disease and diabetes, heart disease, Alzheimer's, and stomach cancer, though more research is needed.

If you practiced ideal dental hygiene, you'd be flossing after every meal. "Do that and you'll have an absolutely immaculate

mouth," says Srivastava, "but we know that's not practical for most people—so we hope our patients floss once daily." Bedtime, rather than morning, is the better choice for once-a-day flossers. "Your salivary flow is very low when you're sleeping," Srivastava says. "So for those seven or eight hours you're in bed, you're not washing away the bacteria teeming in your mouth."

Dentists recommend spending two minutes

brushing your teeth. With practice, flossing will take you an additional minute. Begin on the upper right, go all the way around to the upper left, and then go from the lower left to the lower right.

If you're so exhausted at the end of your day that you can devote only 60 seconds to dental hygiene, what do you do? Floss. "I'm not suggesting you skip brushing, but it's absolutely essential to floss every day," says Srivastava.



PICK AND CHOOSE

STAND IN THE DENTAL AISLE OF YOUR DRUGSTORE, AND YOU'LL SEE A BEWILDERING VARIETY OF DENTAL FLOSS. JYOTI SRIVASTAVA, DDS, BREAKS DOWN THE CHOICES.

Waxed vs. unwaxed floss

Both are equally effective at removing tooth debris, but "I strongly recommend waxed. It's much easier to slide between your teeth and much less likely to shred," says Srivastava.

Flavored wax

It won't add calories, so if you like how dental floss flavored with mint or cinnamon leaves your mouth feeling fresher, that's a great choice for you.

Ribbon or tape vs. fine floss

Opt for wider floss. "Ribbon or tape floss covers a larger portion of the tooth, so it does a better job of cleaning," Srivastava says. "It also feels more comfortable in your hand and is less likely to cut your gums."

Floss picks

These disposable pre-threaded floss holders can help you reach into the back corners of your mouth. They're also great for flossing on the go.

Reviewed by **Eric Yabu, DDS**
WebMD Oral Health Expert