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News Releases

Federal Government, ADA Emphasize Importance of Flossing and Interdental Cleaners

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CHICAGO, IL - Recent news reports question whether existing scientific research support oral health benefits associated with flossing. The bottom line for dentists and patients is that a lack of strong evidence doesn't equate to a lack of effectiveness. As doctors of oral health, dentists are in the best position to advise their patients on oral hygiene practices because they know their patient's oral health status and health history.

The news story also implies that by not including flossing in the 2015 U.S. Dietary Guidelines, the government has changed its stance on flossing, however, this is simply not the case. The Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee (DGAC) made a deliberate decision to focus on food and nutrient intake (i.e., added sugar).

The Dietary Guidelines have no bearing on the longstanding recommendation from the Surgeon General, the CDC, and other health agencies to clean between teeth daily. In fact, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reaffirms the importance of flossing in an Aug. 4 statement to the ADA, which states:

"Flossing is an important oral hygiene practice. Tooth decay and gum disease can develop when plaque is allowed to build up on teeth and along the gum line. Professional cleaning, tooth brushing, and cleaning between teeth (flossing and the use of other tools such as interdental brushes) have been shown to disrupt and remove plaque. At HHS, NIH's National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research (NIDCR), CDC's Division of Oral Health and Healthy People 2020 have additional information and resources about efforts to address and improve oral health."

According to the American Dental Association (ADA), interdental cleaners such as floss are an essential part of taking care of your teeth and gums. Cleaning between teeth removes plaque that can lead to cavities or gum disease from the areas where a toothbrush can't reach. Interdental cleaning is proven to help remove debris between teeth that can contribute to plaque buildup.

More than 500 bacterial species can be found in plaque; some are good and some are bad for your mouth. Together with food debris, water and other components, the plaque buildup around the teeth and on the gum line will contribute to disease in teeth and gums.

Whether you use floss or another interdental cleaner is a personal preference, but it's very important to understand the proper technique for each tool so that it is effective. Patients should talk to their dentists about how to use interdental cleaners to ensure efficacy.

To maintain good oral health, the American Dental Association continues to recommend brushing for two minutes twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste, cleaning between teeth once a day with an interdental cleaner and regular dental visits advised by your dentist.

To learn more about flossing and other interdental cleaners, visit MouthHealthy.org.

About the ADA

The not-for-profit ADA is the nation's largest dental association, representing 159,000 dentist members. The premier source of oral health information, the ADA has advocated for the public's health and promoted the art and science of dentistry since 1859. The ADA's state-of-the-art research facilities develop and test dental products and materials that have advanced the practice of dentistry and made the patient experience more positive. The ADA Seal of Acceptance long has been a valuable and respected guide to consumer dental care products. The monthly The Journal of the American Dental Association (JADA) is the ADA's flagship publication and the best-read scientific journal in dentistry. For more information about the ADA, visit ADA.org. For more information on oral health, including prevention, care and treatment of dental disease, visit the ADA's consumer website MouthHealthy.org

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