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## Cleaning your Teeth and Gums (1977)

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# CLEANING YOUR TEETH AND GUMS



# THINGS YOUR PARENTS NEVER TOLD YOU

Maybe your parents or your teacher told you to brush your teeth three times a day for good dental health.

After a while, you realized yourself that having a clean mouth made you look and feel better. It meant having a fresh breath and a more attractive smile.

But something your parents probably **never** told you was that by cleaning your teeth and gums you were removing something called **plaque**.

What is plaque? It is a sticky, colorless layer containing harmful bacteria that is constantly forming on your teeth.

The bacteria in plaque are recognized to be a primary cause of the two most common dental diseases: (1) dental caries (tooth decay), the major cause of tooth loss in children, and (2) periodontal (gum) disease, the major cause of tooth loss in adults.

Plaque combines with sugar in your mouth, creating acids that eat away at the tooth enamel. Plaque then holds those acids to the teeth, prolonging the attack and allowing decay to begin.

If you don't remove the plaque daily it will accumulate and turn into a hard deposit called calculus (tartar). Calculus can be removed only by your dentist or dental hygienist. If calculus is not removed, more plaque forms on top of it, irritating your gums. Unless you take measures to prevent it, gum disease can destroy the gums and bone that support the teeth. Healthy teeth can be lost.

Don't let this happen! Your teeth were meant to last a lifetime.

# ★ YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN ★

You can prevent dental disease. Your dentist and dental staff can only help

- ☆ by teaching you plaque control and other preventive techniques, and
- ☆ by treating the disease if it has already started.

If you have **regular** dental exams your dentist can discover and treat problems early. When you want to stop **having** dental problems, you can do it. Only **you** can remove the daily plaque accumulation from your teeth.



# DISCLOSE THE ENEMY!

Since plaque is hard to see (figure 1), you can “disclose” or color the plaque before removing it from your teeth. This is easily done by using either disclosing tablets or solutions. They will show you clearly where the plaque is on your teeth (figure 2).



Figure 1: Before disclosing



Figure 2: Note the disclosed plaque especially around the gum line.

## Using a disclosing agent is simple:

1

Chew a tablet or swish a solution around in your mouth.

2

Empty your mouth (spit out or swallow—it's harmless).

3

Examine your teeth with a mirror in a good light.

The color you see on your teeth is the plaque that you must now remove by flossing and brushing (see figure 2). When you can't see any more color on your teeth, the plaque is gone. The disclosing agent may color your tongue and gums for a short while.

4

At first, it helps to disclose the plaque every time you floss and brush. But after you become more experienced in cleaning your teeth you will only have to spot-check occasionally.

# Using Floss

Flossing removes plaque and debris from between the teeth especially near the gum line. It's important that you use floss to clean these areas thoroughly because tooth decay and gum disease often start in these areas where your toothbrush can't reach.

Flossing is a skill that can be developed with a little practice. Don't be discouraged with your first flossing attempt; after a while flossing will take only a few minutes of your time.

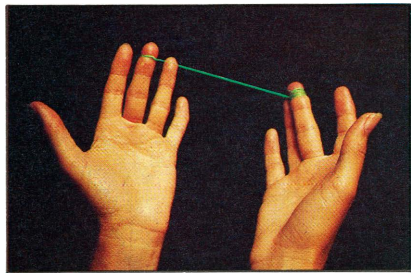


Figure 3

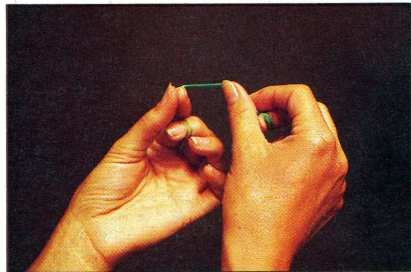


Figure 4



Figure 5

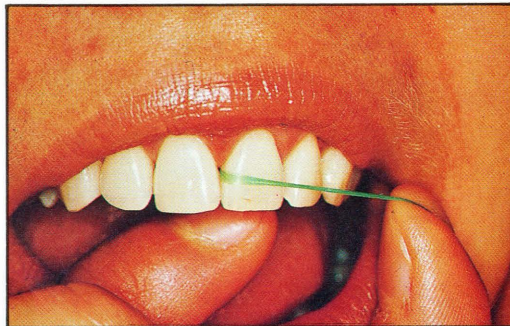


Figure 6

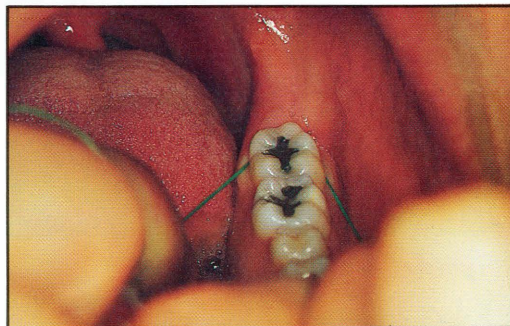


Figure 7

While learning to floss, master these "flossing fundamentals":

**1** Break off 18 inches of floss and wind most of it around one of your middle fingers. Using a loop of floss may be easier for children.

**2** Wind the rest around the same finger of the opposite hand. This finger can "take up" the floss as it becomes soiled (figure 3).

**3** Use your thumbs and forefingers with an inch of floss between them to guide the floss between your teeth (figure 4).

**4** Holding the floss tightly (there should be no slack), use a gentle sawing motion to insert the floss between your teeth. Never "snap" the floss into the gums! When the floss reaches the gum line, curve it into a C-shape against one tooth and gently slide it into the space between the gum and the tooth until you feel resistance (figure 5).

**5** While holding the floss tightly against the tooth, move the floss away from the gum by scraping the side of the tooth.

**6** Without removing the floss, curve it around the other tooth and scrape it too (figure 6). Scrape floss down on upper teeth and up on bottom teeth.

**7** Repeat this method on the rest of your teeth (figure 7).

## Flossing Hints

Think of your mouth as four sections. Floss half of your upper teeth, then the other half; do the same for your lower teeth. Establish a regular time and pattern for flossing, so you won't miss any of your teeth, any day.

Your gums may bleed and be sore for the first five or six days you floss. As the plaque is broken up and the bacteria are removed, the gums heal and the bleeding stops. If you stop flossing for a while, your gums may become infected and bleed again.

If the bleeding does not stop in a few days, consult your dentist. Improper flossing may be injuring your gums. Remember to be gentle when inserting floss between your teeth and under the gum line.

# BASIC BRUSHING

Toothbrushing will remove plaque and other debris from the outer, inner, and biting surfaces of your teeth.

A number of different toothbrushing methods are acceptable. The following method is one that is currently being suggested for removal of plaque.

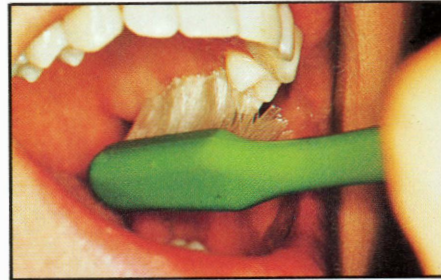


Figure 10



Figure 11

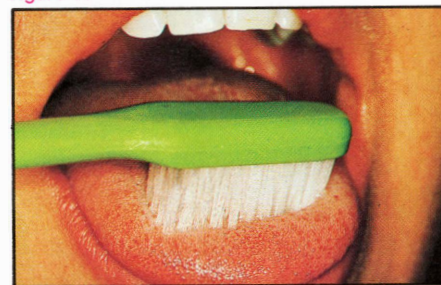


Figure 12



Figure 8

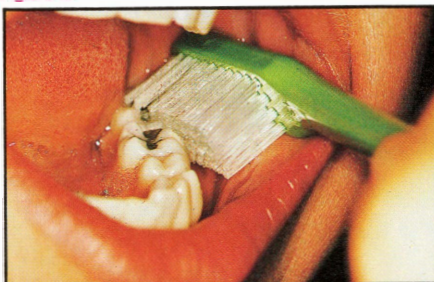


Figure 9

1

Place the head of your toothbrush alongside your teeth, with the bristle tips angled against the gum line (figure 8).

2

Move the brush back and forth with short (half-a-tooth wide) strokes several times, using a gentle "scrubbing" motion.

3

Brush the outer surfaces of each tooth, uppers and lowers, keeping the bristles angled against the gum line (figure 9).

4

Use the same method on all of the **inside** surfaces of your teeth, upper and lower, still using the short back and forth strokes (figure 10).

5

Scrub the chewing surfaces of all teeth, upper and lower.

6

For the front teeth, brush the inside surfaces of the upper and lower jaws by tilting the brush vertically and making several gentle up and down strokes with the "toe" (the front part) of the brush over the teeth and gum tissue (figure 11).

7

Brushing your tongue will help freshen your breath (figure 12).

#### Toothbrush Rx:

Ask your dentist to recommend a toothbrush for you. Most dentists prescribe a brush with a straight handle, a flat brushing surface, and soft, end-rounded bristles. Soft bristles are less likely to injure gum tissues. The head of the brush should be small enough to let you reach every tooth. Children need smaller brushes than those designed for adults.



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