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Recommended Citation

American Dental Association, "Cleaning your Teeth and Gums (1972)" (1972). *Patient Dental Health Education Brochures*. 111.

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Cleaning

Your Teeth

And

Gums

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Things Your Mother Never Told You

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

After awhile, 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 mother 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 of 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 or gum disease (pyorrhea), the major cause of tooth loss in adults.

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 a dental hygienist.

If calculus is not removed, more plaque can form on it, eventually leading to the destruction of teeth and gums . . . a needless occurrence since your teeth were meant to last a lifetime.

You're On Your Own

Using a disclosing agent is simple:

Your dentist can help you prevent tooth loss if you go to him regularly. Your dentist can also treat dental disease if it's already started. He can **instruct** you in plaque control, but only **you** can remove the daily plaque accumulation from your teeth. **DISCLOSE THE ENEMY!**

Since plaque is hard to see, it helps to “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 on your teeth is located. (see figure 1)



Figure 1



Figure 2

1

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

2

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

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.

3

Examine your teeth with a mirror in a well-lighted area.

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

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 few days flossing will take only a few minutes of your time.

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

Flossing Hints

□ Try dividing your mouth into "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.

□ You may experience some bleeding and soreness the first few times you floss. As the plaque is broken up and the bacteria is removed, healing of the gums begins and bleeding will stop. If it does not do so in a few

days, consult your dentist.

□ Remember to be gentle when inserting floss between your teeth and under the gum line.

1

Break off about 18 inches of floss and wind most of it around one of your middle fingers.

2

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

3

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



Figure 3

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. (see figure 5)

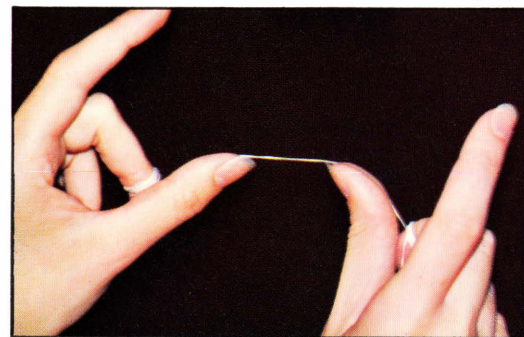


Figure 4

5

While holding the floss tightly against the tooth, move the floss away from the gum by scraping the floss up and down against the side of the tooth.

6

Repeat this method on the rest of your teeth.



Figure 5

Basic Brushing

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

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

1

Place the head of your toothbrush alongside your teeth, with the bristle tips angled against the gum line. (see figure 6)

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.

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.

5

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. (see figure 7)

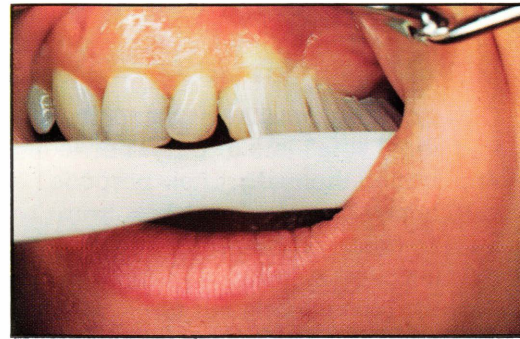


Figure 6

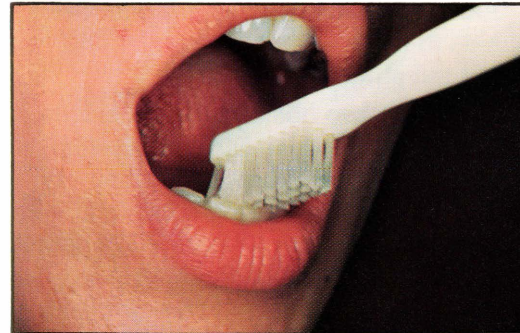


Figure 7

Toothbrushing Tips:

- ☐ A worn out toothbrush will not clean your teeth. Replace your brush often.
- ☐ Your toothbrush will only clean one or two teeth at a time. Change its position frequently.
- ☐ Brush gently and with very short strokes but use enough pressure so that you feel the bristles against the gum.
- ☐ Cleaning your tongue with your brush will help your mouth feel fresher.
- ☐ Toothbrushing, like flossing, takes a little bit of time and practice to do properly.
- ☐ While it's better to brush several times a day be sure to brush (and floss) at least **once** thoroughly every day so that the plaque build-up is kept under control.
- ☐ If you notice any repeated discomfort or bleeding while brushing, consult your dentist.

What Toothpaste Should You Use?

The Council on Dental Therapeutics of the American Dental Association has recognized some toothpastes as containing effective fluoride compounds and being of value in the prevention of dental decay. Look for the authorized council statement on the toothpaste carton.

Toothpaste or tooth powder can increase your pleasure in brushing and leave your mouth feeling fresh.

What About Electric Toothbrushes?

Hand brushes and electric toothbrushes are both effective for cleaning your teeth and gums. Electric toothbrushes can be especially useful for the handicapped. Because of their novelty, children may find the electric toothbrush appealing.

The Council on Dental Materials and Devices of the American Dental Association has recognized some oral irrigating devices and some powered toothbrushes as being effective in cleaning the teeth and gums. Look for the authorized council statement on the carton.

What About Oral Irrigating Devices?

Oral irrigating devices are machines that shoot small jets of water between and around the teeth. Their purpose is to remove loose food debris from hard to reach places. Irrigating devices can be especially helpful for flushing loose debris out of orthodontic appliances (braces). Although some devices are effective **aids to** flossing and brushing, none is a **substitute**.

There are two basic types of devices. One type uses a motor-driven pump to generate an intermittent jet of water. The other type is attached directly to a water faucet. With either type, care should be taken in adjusting the water pressure, since excess pressure may damage the gums. Check with your dentist for advice on the proper use of these devices.

What About Mouthwashes?

A mouthwash can temporarily freshen your breath or sweeten your mouth. However, it does not remove plaque and cannot prevent decay or periodontal disease.

Offensive breath may indicate poor oral health or other bodily disorders. Don't mask these signs of trouble by using a mouthwash.

Do not trust mouthwashes that are claimed to relieve pain or other symptoms of disease. To be safe, use a medicated mouthwash only if prescribed by your dentist.

Reasons For Rinsing

Complete your daily flossing and brushing routine by rinsing your mouth vigorously with water. This will remove loosened plaque and debris from your teeth and gums.

What About Interdental Devices?

There are several kinds of devices on the market, ranging from the rubber-tipped toothbrush to toothpick-like devices. Generally, the advertised purpose of some of these devices is to massage the gums. This is claimed to encourage greater blood circulation, thereby treating or preventing periodontal (gum) disease. The actual benefits provided by such massage are questionable. On the other hand improper use of these products can injure the gums and sometimes can even make gum disease worse.

Some dentists do recommend using these certain devices as cleaning agents because they can remove plaque from the teeth when used properly. However, they should be used as prescribed by your dentist.



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