



INTERDENTAL CLEANING

For teeth and health: Super floss to the rescue

What's 18 inches long, costs only \$7 a year, is strong enough to have freed prisoners from their cells, yet submissive enough to wrap around your little finger?

Give up? The dental floss you should be using every day. However, according to a survey by the American Dental Association (ADA), only about 49 percent of the U.S. population reports using this white wonder as often as they should.

There are plenty of good reasons to be a flossing fanatic: keeping your teeth, promoting fresh breath and avoiding possible repercussions of periodontal disease such as increased risk of heart disease or stroke. Yet, people come up with plenty of excuses to skip this simple 2-3 minute task. In hopes of encouraging flossing mania to sweep your home, following is more information than you prob-

ably ever wanted to know about dental floss. Next time you try to overlook the floss in your medicine cabinet, maybe some of these flossing factoids will give you pause:

- If you don't floss, you miss cleaning about 30 percent of your teeth's



surfaces. Often, periodontal disease begins between teeth where your toothbrush can't reach.

■ Americans purchased more than 2.7 million miles of dental floss in 1996. However, if all Americans were flossing every day, more like 27 million miles of floss should have been used. (Hmm, maybe some of the respondents to the

ADA survey fibbed about their flossing frequency.)

■ There have been reports of prisoners who escaped after using dental floss to gradually saw through cell bars.

■ Bleeding during flossing is not normal and not okay. If your hands bled when you washed them, would you overlook it? Bleeding is a sign of periodontal disease. If your gums bleed for more than a week after you begin flossing, improve your dental hygiene regimen and talk with your dentist or periodontist.

■ Dental floss was first manufactured in 1882 and was made of silk.

■ You're never too young to floss. It's most important to start flossing your kids' teeth when the gaps between them close, but starting even before this helps establish the habit.

■ Don't flush the floss! Dental floss has been known to block sewers because it does not disintegrate and can wrap around roots, pumps and other obstructions. ❗

For more information visit www.perio.org or call 1-800-FLOSS-EM for the free brochure, HOW TO BRUSH AND FLOSS

An ounce of floss is worth a pound of prevention

Now that you're committed to keeping your teeth and protecting your health, you'll want to be sure to floss correctly.

Choosing a floss: The dental aisle of your local drugstore offers an array of choices. Look for dental floss that has ADA acceptance. Other than that, choosing one is mostly a matter of personal preference. Studies have found no difference between waxed and unwaxed, tape and cord and nylon and polymer floss as far as cleaning capacity. However, for people with tight spaces between teeth, a polymer floss may work best. And, if a flavored floss makes flossing more enjoyable, choose that.

Floss first? There is not a clear

cut answer on whether it is better to floss then brush, or brush then floss. However, flossing first may loosen plaque, which can then be brushed away with your toothbrush.

Step-by-step: Use a piece of floss about 18 inches long. Wind most of the floss around a middle finger of one hand and most of the rest around a middle finger on the opposite hand. Gently insert the floss between the teeth using a back-and-forth motion, guiding the floss with your forefingers. Guide the floss to the gumline and curve the floss into a C-shape. Slide it into the space between the gum

and tooth until you feel light resistance. Repeat this process between every tooth and don't forget the back sides of your back teeth.

If you don't see food particles, don't be disappointed. The primary function of dental floss is actually to remove the invisible film of bacteria that constantly forms between the teeth, causing plaque.

Flossing options: For people with dexterity problems, power flossers or floss holders may be useful. Otherwise, regular floss works just as well and makes it easier to make the C-shape around your teeth. ❗

The American Academy of Periodontology Patient Page is a public service of the AAP and should not be used as a substitute for the care and advice of your personal periodontist. There may be variations in treatment that your periodontist will recommend based on individual facts and circumstances. Call 1-800-FLOSS-EM for a free brochure on periodontal disease.