

Flossing: the why, the how, the when, the where and the *whatever*.

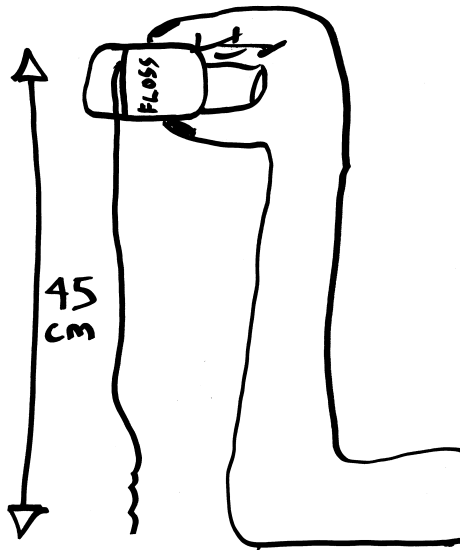
Purpose

The purpose of floss is to remove plaque from tooth surfaces which can't be brushed.

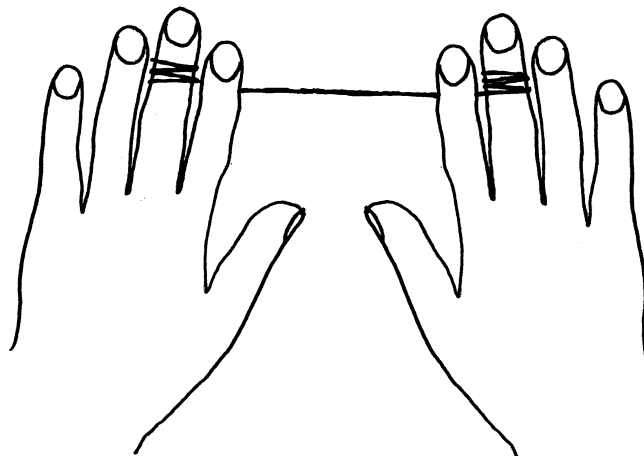
Technique

Plaque is bad for your teeth - very bad. Plaque releases acid, acid dissolves the tooth enamel and makes holes develop. Worse still, the acid attacks the nearby gums and makes them inflamed. Long term inflammation causes gum disease and, later, tooth loss.

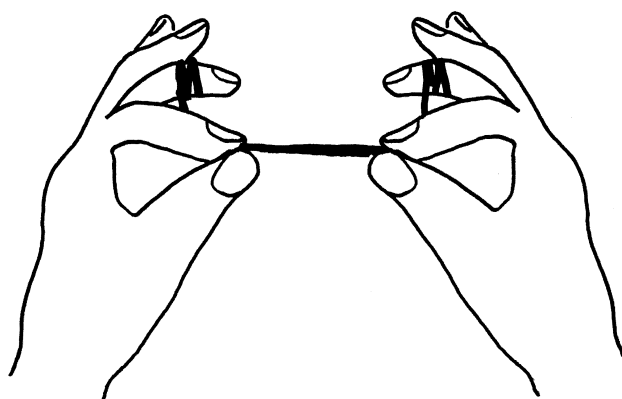
Successful flossing is a skill that takes time to learn. Break off a length of floss approximately the same length as your forearm.



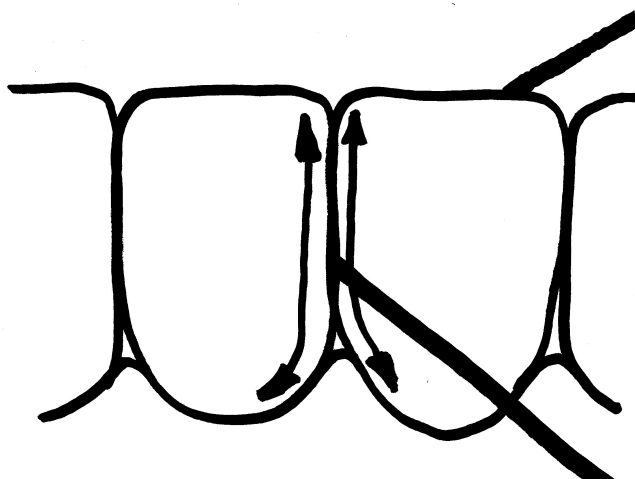
Wrap the floss round the end joint of your longest finger, with a gap of about the same length as your first finger.



Grip the floss between thumb and first finger.



Slide the floss between two teeth, using a slight in-and-out movement if necessary. Run the floss up and down against one surface; then up and down against the other surface. Work round all the gaps, and also floss the areas behind the very back teeth as well.



How often?

Plaque builds up at different rates for different people. You can easily tell if you are flossing often enough - there won't be any bleeding if you floss often enough. If you don't floss often enough you'll get bleeding every time. Simple. Start off flossing once a day, Christmas Day included and go from there. Some people, your humble scribe included, have to floss some spots twice a day to keep bleeding in check. It's quite in order to floss selected areas if they give a recurring problem.

How does it work?

The reason flossing stops bleeding is that it stops anaerobic activity in plaque bacteria. When the plaque layer is thin enough oxygen gets to the bacteria to allow aerobic respiration. Thicker layers starve the bacteria of oxygen forcing them to change to anaerobic respiration. Basically we're talking about letting oxygen get in there. Anaerobic respiration leads to the release of lactic acid. That's what does the damage.

Conclusion

Some people don't bother to floss, they end up needing more dental treatment and they lose their teeth sooner than people who do floss.

That last bit is the *whatever* message, in case that's not blindingly obvious.

Multiple choice questions

1. How often should you floss?

- A. Never
- B. Every day
- C. Every week
- D. Just before going out on the razz
- E. Often enough so that there's no bleeding when you floss

2. What does flossing do?

- A. Gives you fresh breath
- B. Makes you popular
- C. Stops gum disease developing

3. How long is a piece of floss?

- A. Ten meters
- B. Two foot six and a half inches
- C. About the distance from the tips of your fingers to your elbow

4. How does flossing work?

- A. It give you a sparkling smile
- B. It removes spinach from between your teeth
- C. It lets oxygen get into the spaces between the teeth

5. What causes the bleeding?

- A. Flossing
- B. Inflammation caused by lactic acid
- C. Eating razor blades

6. Do you want to go to the dentist more often than you need to?

- A. Yes
- B. No
