

Interdental Cleaning

Toothbrushing done effectively will clean the outer, inner and biting surfaces of the teeth (about 70% of the tooth) but no toothbrush will completely clean the remaining 30% between the teeth, where the front and back surfaces of the teeth butt up against other teeth. This is a common place where tooth decay starts, and also where gum disease starts. To clean these areas we need a different technique.

Flossing done effectively is a good way to clean between the teeth but unfortunately, most people struggle to do it well leading to claims of it being ineffective. So often patients see floss as a way of removing bits of food, and while it can certainly be used for this, this is not it's main purpose. Overall it has been found that interdental brushes are more effective than floss.

The purpose of all interdental cleaning, be it with floss or special interdental brushes is to remove plaque from the teeth either side of the space, not the space itself. So for each space, there are two teeth which need cleaning.

Interdental brushes

Interdental brushes such as Curaprox and TePes are a bit easier to use than floss. They come in a wide range of colour coded sizes, and also in straight and right angled varieties. They are simple to use, the straights are best for front teeth and the right angled best for back teeth. The brush needs to be placed at 90 degrees to the space between the teeth and pushed through between the teeth, ensuring you can feel it rubbing on the gum at the base. Most patients do this in a direction from the outside towards the inside, but occasionally for back teeth it can help to do inside to outside also. You will need to ensure you have the right sized brush for the right space. Trying to force a large brush into a small space will damage both the brush and gum while too small a brush will not clean the teeth effectively. Sometimes patients tell us that the brushes buckle up, this only happens if you attempt to put them into the space at an oblique angle. Used properly, they are an excellent product.

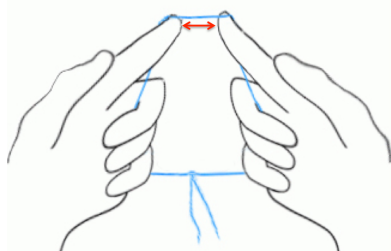


For very tight spaces such as between some lower incisors, products such as the silicone coated TePe EasyPick may be useful. Their design makes them both flexible and adaptable to clean irregular interdental spaces.



Flossing

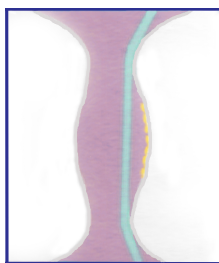
A good flossing technique uses only about ½ inch (1.25cm) spanned between the fingers. With a longer amount, the control is lost. A good way is to tie a 6inch (15cm) piece of floss into a circle and hold it as shown in the diagram. With this hold and the two outstretched forefingers you should be able to reach all the teeth in the mouth. Move the floss through your hands as you go, so as not to be using the same section all the time. When you try and introduce floss in between the teeth, there will be an initial resistance, don't be tempted just to push hard down,



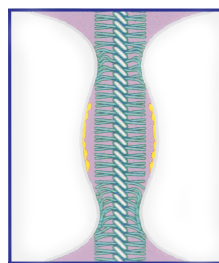
just gently saw back and forth and the floss will slide through. When below this initial contact area, tense the floss against one tooth in a C shape and move it up and down so the floss goes under the gum. Move it across the space to the adjacent tooth again tensing it against the tooth, and again work up and down a few times. Once this has been done, remove the floss from the space and go into the next space. Many patients find floss holders easier to handle but the technique for use is the same. Flossing (or use of interdental brushes) should ideally be done once a day.



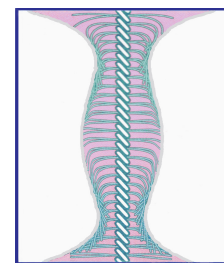
As gum disease progresses and more tooth root becomes exposed, the generally convex rounded shapes of the teeth change, with grooves and concavities becoming more common. These are far better cleaned with brushes rather than floss, but the right size is needed.



Floss cannot clean into grooves



Too narrow a brush misses the plaque



The correct size brush gets into concavities and removes the plaque

SulcaBrush and single tufted brushes



The SulcaBrush is an excellent product with replaceable single tufted brushes at either end, each set at different angles to allow access to different parts of the mouth. Most other single tufted brushes have an angled brush set at one end only. They are particularly good for cleaning around the rear surfaces of back teeth and working around the gum margins and helping to clean between the teeth.



Air Floss and WaterPik

While these products are popular with patients as they are fairly easy to use, we feel that while they may be useful for removing bits of food, they are not effective enough at removing adherent plaque from the tooth surfaces. For a patient who is not susceptible to gum disease, this may not be too much of an issue, but for a patient who is susceptible and needs rigorous plaque control, then these products are less than ideal.

Wood sticks

Wood sticks or any cleaning agent of a fixed shape will only dislodge food or clean the tooth surface at the point at which it happens to touch. Because the shape between teeth is very variable, the chance of effective plaque removal is negligible. Cleaning aids need to be able to adapt to the shape of the space they are being tasked with cleaning.