

## ADA Healthy Smile Tips

- ◆ Brush your teeth twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste
- ◆ Clean between your teeth once a day
- ◆ Eat a healthy diet and limit snacks
- ◆ Visit your dentist regularly



For more information about taking care of your teeth and gums, visit Mouth-Healthy.org, the ADA's website just for patients.

## Taking Care of Your Teeth and Gums



## What causes tooth decay and gum disease?

Your teeth are covered with a thin film of bacteria called plaque. After a meal or snack, these bacteria convert foods to sugar (glucose). These sugars attack the enamel, the tooth's hard outer white layer. Plaque can also build up overnight while you are sleeping. Repeated attacks can cause the enamel to break down and lead to cavities.

Your saliva reduces plaque by cleaning the mouth and helping to digest food while you chew. But if there is not enough saliva, the number of bacteria in your mouth will increase, along with the amount of acid they produce. This lack of saliva flow is called "dry mouth" and can be caused by certain medications or diseases like diabetes. Dry mouth may increase your risk of tooth decay.

If you brush twice a day and floss once a day, you can remove most of the plaque and harmful bacteria. But if plaque stays on the teeth, it will eventually harden to tartar. Tartar can build up near the gum line. Since tartar is more difficult to brush away, it gives bacteria a place to grow without being disturbed.

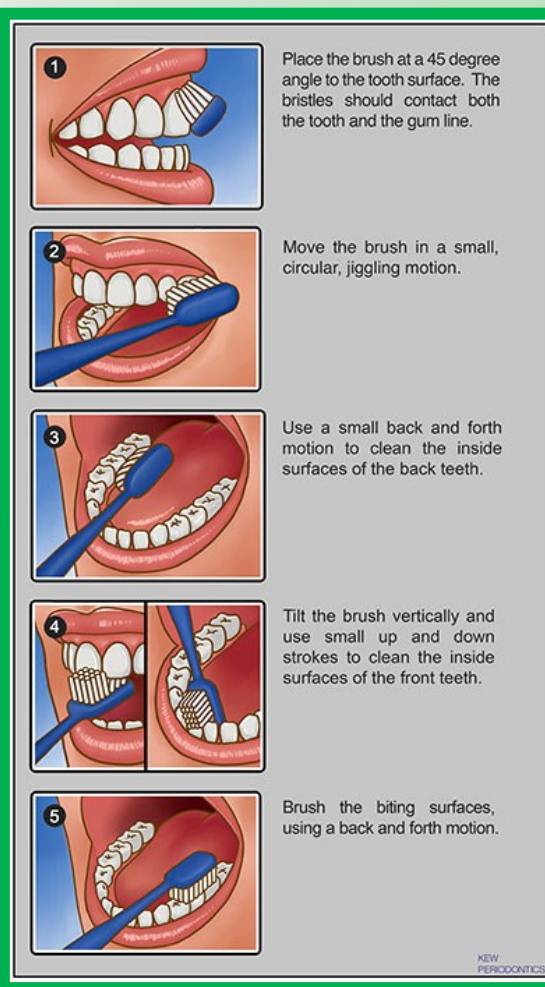
Plaque that is not removed can irritate and inflame the gums, causing them to swell and bleed. This is called gingivitis and is the early stage of gum disease. The good news is that gingivitis can be treated and reversed with professional dental cleaning and good oral hygiene at home.

If gum disease (gingivitis) is left untreated, it can cause your gums to pull away from your teeth. Pockets or spaces can form between the teeth and gums. These pockets can become infected and the bacteria dissolve away the bone support around the teeth. In advanced stages of gum disease, the bone loss causes the teeth to become loose and fall out or have to be removed.

You can prevent tooth decay and gum disease by brushing and flossing every day. It is much easier and less expensive to prevent tooth decay and gum disease than to treat them later.

## Tips for brushing teeth properly

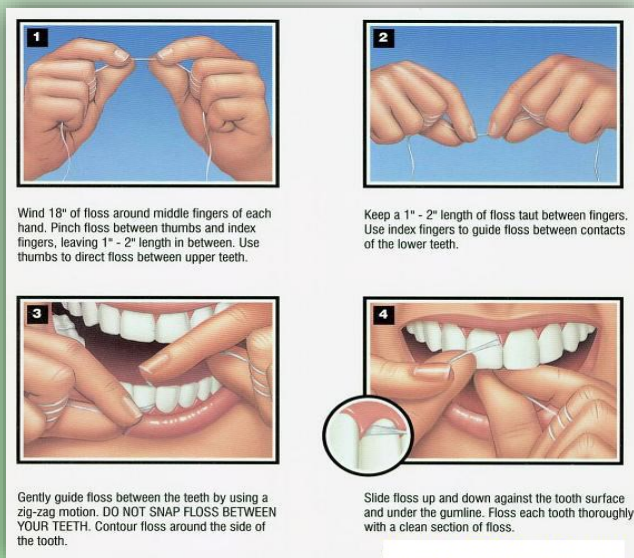
Brush twice a day for two minutes with a soft toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste to prevent tooth decay. Fluoride is a mineral that makes teeth stronger.





## Why do I need to clean between my teeth ?

There are many ways to clean between your teeth and flossing is the most common. Flossing removes plaque and food particles from between the teeth and under the gum line. It may feel clumsy at first, but don't give up. It takes time to get the hang of it and your dentist and hygienist can show you the correct way to floss. If you haven't been flossing, you may experience sore or bleeding gums for the first few days. This should stop once the plaque is broken up and the bacteria are removed. If not, you should consult a dentist.




## Flossing Alternatives

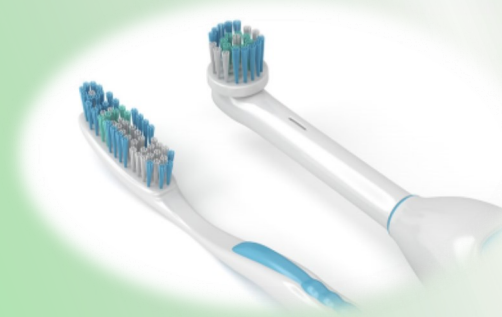
If you **are** having trouble handling floss, you may wish to try some other ways to clean between your teeth. There are a number of products known as interdental cleaners, that you can use. These include water flossers, pre-threaded flossers, tiny brushes, and wooden plaque removers. Your dentist can tell you which product will be most helpful. Children as young as 4 can use floss aids easily. This is important because cavities can develop early.



**Dental disease is 100% preventable by looking after your teeth through proper brushing and flossing.**

## There are so many dental products. How do I know what works best?

- **Choose products that have the American Dental Association Seal of Acceptance.** The ADA seal on a product means that it has met the ADA standards for safety and acceptance. Look for this seal on toothbrushes, fluoride toothpastes, mouth rinses, interdental cleaners, and more. 
- **Look for a toothpaste with fluoride.** Fluoride helps keep tooth enamel strong and can help in repairing the early stages of tooth decay. If your teeth are sensitive, the dentist may recommend a special toothpaste like Sensodyne.
- **Choose a toothbrush with soft bristles that feels comfortable in your hand and mouth, and use it twice a day.** All ADA-accepted toothbrushes whether manual or powered, earn that seal because they can remove plaque above the gum line and reduce gingivitis. For children, use a child size brush.



- **Replace your toothbrush every 3 or 4 months or sooner if the bristles become frayed.** A worn toothbrush won't clean your teeth properly. Children's toothbrushes need to be replaced sooner because they wear out faster. If you have hand, arm, or shoulder problems, that limit movement, you may find a powered **toothbrush** easier to use.
- **Oral irrigating devices use a jet stream of water to remove food particles from around the teeth.** They can be helpful for people who wear braces or dentures. But remember that an oral irrigator is meant to enhance and not replace regular brushing and flossing.
- **Check mouth rinse labels carefully.** Some mouth rinses just have a pleasant taste while others kill germs and reduce plaque formation. Some also have fluoride. If you're constantly using a breath freshener, for bad breath, make sure to see your dentist for a check up.
- **Ask your dentist or hygienist for product tips.** People's needs vary greatly and your dental team can point you to products that will work best for you.