

Oral Hygiene Techniques

Flossing

- Minimum of once every 24 hours.
- Use unwaxed floss (waxed floss will not give 'squeaky clean' sound easily).
- Use approximately one yard or an arm's length.
- Hold floss securely by wrapping the ends of your ring fingers. This will maintain circulation at the finger tips.
- Wrap more floss on one finger than the other (serves as a supply reel).
- Use index fingers and thumbs to manipulate floss.
- Use 6 to 8 inches of floss between ring fingers, depending on whether working front or back teeth.
- Use only enough floss to get through contact.
- When first going through contact area, use back and forth motion.
- Once through contact, *only* go up and down the length of the tooth.
- Lay floss around tooth as much as possible (get curvature).
- Go down (or up) toward tissue until you just get gentle resistance.
- Then, move floss up and down approximately 2 to 6 times until you get a 'squeaky clean' sound.
- Some teeth will not squeak.

Brushing

- Use a soft bristle toothbrush
- A smaller brush head gives better access than a large one.
- Every tooth has a potential space around its complete circumference where the gum tissue is not attached to the tooth. This depth may be abnormally deep and diseased, in which case it is a periodontal 'pocket.'
- Your brushing technique should be such that you concentrate on getting into and cleaning this potential space. Obviously, the deeper the space, the more limited the access.
- This is best done by positioning the brush bristles at a 45° angle to the length or long axis of the tooth.
- Slide the bristles along the side of the tooth.
- Then, using a circular, elliptical jiggling motion, work the bristles below the gum line as much as is practical.
- After 5 to 10 seconds, sweep any bacteria you have loosened up and out of the area by flipping the brush bristles out of the space.
- Repeat approximately three times in each area.
- Not all teeth in your mouth are positioned straight up and down. Look at the tooth angulation and position brush properly. For example, lower back teeth are usually tilted inward at a 20° angle, and the lower front teeth are usually tilted outward.
- Access to the outside of the upper back teeth is increased by sliding the lower jaw to that side and closing slightly; opening wide only reduces space in that area.
- Due to the shape of the dental arches, the insides of the upper and lower front teeth need to be brushed with the toothbrush head being oriented in the same direction as the teeth, but still maintaining the 45° angulation. (You almost have to do one tooth at a time.)
- Trying to brush spaces between teeth where one or two teeth are missing is virtually impossible with a conventional brush. Other means will be described.

Yarn

- Conventional yarn used in place of floss where space is enlarged is far superior in cleaning efficiency than floss.
- Ideal usage areas are:
 - The back surfaces of the last teeth in the arch.
 - Spaces between teeth.
 - Spaces where teeth are missing for whatever reason.
 - Spaces between teeth with receded gums where a loop of floss is used to get multiple strands of yarn between the teeth.
 - Yarn may be used under bridges with the use of a floss threader. (described later)
- Since the greater bulk of yarn is what makes its use more effective, the use of several (2-8) strands, where space allows, is recommended.
- Techniques are similar to those of floss use. Avoid the tendency to use a “shoeshine” technique. Go up and down like floss.
- Yarn need only be moved slightly on the tooth surface to dislodge the plaque.
- Type of yarn: 2-3 ply.

Perio-Aid

- A perio-aid is an instrument with a toothpick at its end.
- 1/32 or 1/16 of the end of the toothpick is turned into a small brush by nibbling on it.
- The little brush may now be used to clean areas with particularly poor access for other means.
- Concavities or areas of multi-rooted teeth where the roots divide are particularly well cleaned with a perio-aid.
- Using toothpicks to clean the entire mouth, however, has been shown to be ineffective.

Proxabrush

- A small circular brush (small version of a bottle brush) on a handle.
- Excellent for post-surgical patients to clean spaces between teeth.
- Particularly effective for concavities between teeth not accessible to any other form of plaque control.
- When using a proxabrush, it is important to manipulate it in such a way that all areas where the gums and tooth surface meet are cleaned by moving the brush around the curved aspect of the teeth.

Floss Threader

- A loop of thin plastic (looks like fishing line) fused along one end.
- This loop is used to lead either floss or yarn under a bridge.
- The floss or yarn is then used in a routine manner.

Disclosing Medium

- To properly clean teeth, it is necessary to use one of the above methods for cleaning between teeth and then brushing.
- Once both areas have been done, it is important to verify whether all areas are clean.
- A disclosing medium (tablet or liquid) is used. It will indicate areas that have been cleaned as well as areas requiring further attention.
- If there is a choice, the liquid is a more effective disclosant.

- A little mouth mirror is used to see all areas.
- Good light is needed (a flashlight, high intensity lamp, make-up mirror, or floxlite, designed specifically for this purpose). Just regular light in the bathroom is inadequate.
- Fluoride use is important to help prevent cavity formation. It may be applied by using fluoridated toothpaste or by other means (gel or rinse) once the teeth have been cleaned.

General

- As you begin this regimen, and have a complete complement of teeth, plan on spending 20 to 30 minutes when you go through the cleaning process. Fewer teeth will require proportionately less time. As you become familiar with your particular problem areas and more effective with your techniques, you may find that 10 to 15 minutes may be effective. Most likely, five minutes is not going to be enough time.
- Remember, it is only necessary to clean one's teeth properly once every 24 hours. That means the cleaning should include whatever steps are necessary in your particular case.
- Bleeding gums are a good clinical indicator of gingival disease. Initially, bleeding may be profuse. It should dramatically decrease within one week of proper cleaning. Do not let the bleeding deter you, since it merely indicates diseased sites. It will not stop until the areas are properly cleaned.

GOOD LUCK!