Brushing and Flossing

Brushing your teeth

Brushing your teeth prevents tooth decay by removing the plaque that forms on your teeth each day. Plaque is a thin, hard-to-see layer of germs that covers the teeth and gums.

When you brush your teeth

- Use fluoride toothpaste.
- Hold the brush against your teeth with the bristles touching your gumline. Think of the brush as both a toothbrush and a gum-brush.
- Brush using short strokes — gently move the brush back and forth. Don’t try to force the bristles under the gum. That will happen naturally, especially if you use a brush that has soft, flexible bristles. If you brush too hard, you might cause your gums to be pushed back (recede). This can expose and irritate the roots of your teeth.
- Brush all sides of all your teeth several times. You need to brush all of the inner, outer, and chewing surfaces of every tooth.
- Brush the top of your tongue. This will remove germs and help freshen your breath.
- Don’t rinse with water after brushing. To get the benefit from the fluoride in toothpaste, spit out the toothpaste but don’t rinse with water.
- Brush at least twice a day — in the morning and again before bedtime.
- Don’t rush your brush. It takes at least 2 to 3 minutes to do a good job.

Good advice

- Use a toothbrush with soft bristles. Toothbrushes with hard bristles can damage gums and teeth.
- Don’t always brush in exactly the same way. No one brushes their teeth perfectly — we all miss spots.
- Once a week, try changing your usual way of brushing. For example, start brushing on the opposite side. This might help you to reach the areas you might be missing.
- Replace your toothbrush often. You need a new toothbrush when your old one looks frayed — every 2 or 3 months.
- Power toothbrushes work just as well as regular toothbrushes if you use them the right way. Hold the brush against your teeth with the bristles touching your gumline. Don’t use a brushing motion. Instead, let the power toothbrush work on each surface of every tooth until it’s clean. There are many different kinds of power toothbrushes to choose from, so ask your dentist or dental hygienist for advice.

Helping children brush

- Children need help with brushing. When children can tie their shoes or colour between the lines, they will usually be able to brush on their own. You’ll need to watch them while they brush until you’re sure that they are doing it right every time. Check afterwards to be sure they’ve done a good job.
- Use a tiny, pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste. Teach them how to spit out the toothpaste after brushing.
• For children under age 3, the Canadian Dental Association says that unless there is a risk of tooth decay, you should use water to brush your child’s teeth. If you are not sure if your child is at risk for tooth decay, talk with a health care provider.
• Keep toothpaste out of the reach of children.

Flossing
• Regular flossing is the single most important thing you can do to prevent gum disease.
• Flossing removes plaque and bits of food from the sides of your teeth and under the gumline — places that toothbrush bristles can’t reach. Flossing each day can help prevent gum disease and tooth decay.
• There are many different types of dental floss — waxed and unwaxed, flavoured and unflavoured, wide and regular. You get the same benefits no matter what type of dental floss you use. If you find using floss awkward or difficult, try one of the dental floss holders you’ll find in the pharmacy or other places where you buy toothbrushes and floss.

When you floss
• Use about 45 centimetres (18 inches) of floss. Wrap most of the floss around the middle finger of one hand, and the rest around the middle finger of your other hand.
• Hold the floss firmly between your thumbs and forefingers. Leave about 2 centimetres (1 inch) between your hands and guide the floss gently between your teeth.
• Gently slide the floss back and forth to get it between your teeth. Don’t force the floss into your gums!
• Once the floss is between your teeth, curve it into a C-shape against one of your teeth. Gently slide the floss up and down the side of your tooth and just below the gum. Repeat for the other side.
• As the floss becomes soiled, unwrap it to use a clean section.

Good advice
Don’t give up if flossing is difficult when you first do it. Flossing is a skill that can take time to learn. After a while, it will get easier and take only a few minutes. Your gums may bleed and be sore the first week that you floss. Don’t worry! This will stop when your gums get used to regular flossing and become healthier.

Helping children floss
Most children will need help flossing until they are about 8 to 10 years old. You’ll need to watch them while they floss until you’re sure that they are doing it right every time. Check afterwards to be sure they’ve done a good job. Children often find it easier to use a loop of floss.
• Take a piece of floss about 10 inches long and tie the ends together to make a circle.
• Have the child hold the floss tightly between the thumbs and forefingers to floss.

Talk to your dental hygienist or family dentist if you have any questions about brushing or flossing.