

# YOUR ORAL HEALTH.ca™

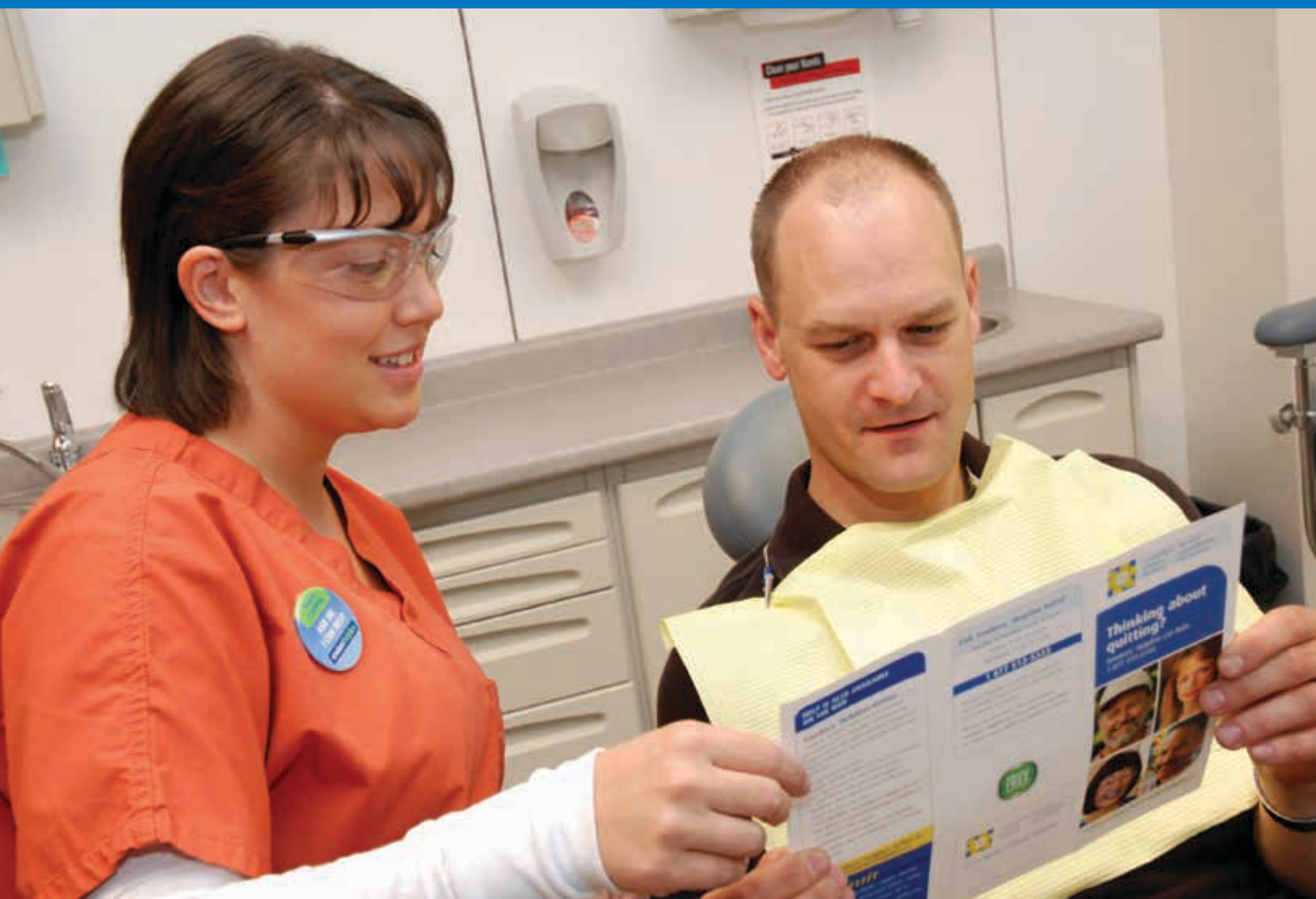
BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE ONTARIO DENTAL ASSOCIATION

fall/winter  
2016-17



## Do I Need to Floss?

# The majority of people who use tobacco **want to quit.**



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**smokers' helpline**

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# Welcome



from Dr. Deborah Saunders,  
Editor-in-Chief

When Dr. Ian McConnachie and I were discussing the proposed content of this issue of *Your Oral Health.ca Magazine* with our editorial staff, we both had the same idea: Why not focus on an oral health-care topic that has been in the news recently? I am referring, of course, to the great floss debate that took place last summer. Perhaps it was a slow news day, but the media seized upon a report that alleged that the benefits of flossing were overblown. Of course, my colleagues and I were quite concerned and immediately went to great lengths to reassure our patients of the facts — flossing is an integral part of everyone's individual oral health-care routine. Think about it. How else are you going to remove debris and plaque from *between* your teeth? And so, we decided to set the record straight about the benefits of flossing in these pages. We hope that after reading these articles, you will have a much better understanding of why flossing is recommended so highly. No more excuses! And if you find floss difficult to use, there are a number of interdental devices, of which floss is only one, that can help you and your family take control of your oral health.

As Dr. McConnachie says, about his own practice, "One of the joys of pediatric dentistry is graduating our kids to an adult practice. Besides the goodbye hug, we talk about how they can continue to maintain good oral health as adults. Central to that is our review of strategies to take care of themselves at home, and flossing is right up at the top."

Good habits start early. Instill the benefits of a good oral health-care routine that includes brushing and flossing daily, so those toddlers can grow up to become adults with healthy, attractive smiles. And that also works for those of us who are no longer kids; it's never too late to enjoy the benefits of good oral health care.

In conclusion, it's hard for me to believe that it has been four years since we launched this magazine for our patients. During those years, we have explored a variety of oral health-care topics and answered many of the questions that you, our patients, ask dentists every day. Ontario dentists and our patients tell us that this magazine provides them with valuable information — and most importantly to our patients, information that is supplied, reviewed and vetted by the Ontario Dental Association's dentists and our Advisory Board.

As always, please let us know what you think about this issue and what other topics you'd like us to explore. Contact us at [yoh@oda.ca](mailto:yoh@oda.ca).

For information about a variety of oral health-care topics, please visit our public website at [youroralhealth.ca](http://youroralhealth.ca). You will also find Patient Fact Sheets, brochures and posters that you can download and recent issues of *Your Oral Health.ca Magazine*.

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## Mission of the Ontario Dental Association

At the Ontario Dental Association we provide innovative and inspired leadership to deliver exceptional value by:

- Promoting the highest standards of dental care and supporting our diverse membership in their pursuit of professional excellence and personal fulfillment;
- Fostering a collaborative workplace environment which promotes creativity and personal growth while celebrating achievements; and
- Advocating with a unified voice for accessible and sustainable optimal oral health for all Ontarians.

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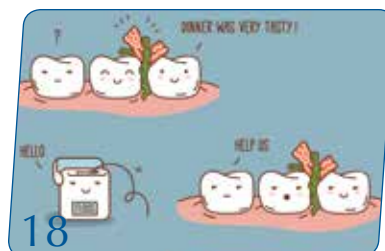
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# Flossing Each Day Helps Keep Tooth Decay Away

By Victoria George

Dental floss and other interdental devices are effective, safe and easy-to-use methods for cleaning hidden and hard-to-reach places between the teeth, helping improve your oral health



**Why do I need to floss?**

**Is flossing even necessary?**

**What does flossing do, exactly?**

**And how does flossing improve my oral health?**

These are just some of the questions on the minds of people across North America after a recent *Associated Press* report that described flossing as “weak” and “very unreliable.” However, flossing remains an oral hygiene practice recommended by dentists and dental associations around the world.

A 2011 edition of the *Cochrane Review* did credit flossing in addition to brushing with a reduction in gum disease compared to tooth brushing alone, but the evidence is still considered unreliable. Additionally, flossing was removed from the 2015–2020 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* by the U.S. government because of a lack of reliable evidence on its effectiveness.

Nonetheless, the Canadian Dental Association (CDA), the Ontario Dental Association (ODA) and dentists across Canada insist that flossing is beneficial and an integral part of your oral health routine. It is one step in maintaining healthy teeth and gums as it helps remove hard-to-reach food particles (debris) from between the teeth, which develop into plaque. Plaque, an invisible bacterial film that develops on your teeth, can lead to tooth decay and gum disease.

“The question I ask of any patient is, ‘Why do you brush your teeth?’ The answers may well be: ‘to get them clean’; ‘to prevent disease’; ‘so that they feel better’; and many other answers, says Dr. Clive Friedman, a pediatric dentist and an assistant clinical university professor in private practice at Pediatric Oral Health and Dentistry in London. “Certainly, however, brushing does not get between the teeth, and thus, we need the use of floss.”

While the use of dental floss or other interdental cleaning devices does not definitively prevent dental diseases, it reduces the chances. And although Dr. Friedman notes that flossing or brushing won’t prevent tooth decay — a disease with many causes and variations — he does stress that flossing helps in minimizing the risk of getting cavities.

Flossing is considered preventive and an inexpensive method for removing plaque, yet there are no clinical studies to support this claim. Why? Partly because of the sheer number of patients needed for a study to monitor their oral health for at least two to three years, partly due to cost and partly due to ethical considerations – a clinical trial may mean exposing a control group to situations where they have an increased chance of tooth decay and gum diseases.

“In our clinical practice, we see evidence [that flossing works] every day.”

— Dr. Stephen Abrams

Dr. Stephen Abrams, a general dental practitioner in Scarborough with more than 36 years of clinical experience, says that although there are no clinical studies to support the effectiveness of flossing, that doesn’t mean flossing isn’t effective. He believes it comes down to weighing the probable risks and benefits. “In our clinical practice, we see evidence [that flossing works] every day. We find reduced incidence of tooth decay and healthier gum tissue in our patients who use floss or other methods to remove food debris and plaque between teeth.”

# Flossing

Dental floss is one of many interdental cleaners, which include wooden stimulators, irrigation devices and interdental brushes. "It probably doesn't matter what type of interdental cleaning device is used; instead, there are various types of interdental devices that when used appropriately, oral health is improved," says Hamilton periodontist Dr. Christopher McCulloch, who's a dentistry professor at the University of Toronto and Director of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research Group in Matrix Dynamics.

Even though the CDA and the ODA recommend flossing to patients, flossing doesn't necessarily apply to every patient. Be sure to speak to your dentist about what type(s) of interdental care product(s) will be most effective for your individual needs and the proper technique required. "Some patients may think dentists and dental hygienists insist only on the use of dental floss," says Dr. McCulloch. "In my opinion, however, most dental hygienists and dentists customize the interdental oral hygiene methods to the needs and abilities of patients. So floss is not a cure-all, but instead may be substituted with other methods." [yoh](#)



## Did you know?

- Cleaning between the teeth is essential to your daily oral hygiene routine.
- The absence of flossing invariably leads to tooth decay, gum disease and mouth odour.
- Start flossing your child's teeth as soon as at least two teeth are touching each other.
- Flossing without rinsing the floss wand after flossing each tooth is moving bacteria from one tooth to the next. Always rinse your floss wand, or better still, use a new piece of floss every time you change from one tooth to another.
- If the floss runs through the gum rather than between the gum and the tooth, it can damage the gum and may result in redness or swelling. Consult your dentist on how best to avoid redness and swelling when you floss.
- When you floss first, any bacteria removed interdentally – between the teeth – can then be brushed away.
- Embracing the habit of flossing is one of the easiest, most inexpensive and safest methods of minimizing the risk of getting long-term dental diseases.

# From Grass to Nylon: Millions of Years of Cleaning Between Our Teeth

By Catherine Solmes

Humans have likely been cleaning between their teeth for as long as we've had teeth. Here's a brief history of interdental cleaning, from our earliest days through to today.

## Grass and twigs

### Grass

Can you imagine using grass stalks to clean between your teeth? Fossilized human teeth dating back 1.8 million years suggests that our early ancestors did just that.

### Twigs and splinters

Our early ancestors also likely used twigs or splinters of wood to remove food from between their teeth. It's believed that this practice evolved when humans began eating meat, and that using tools to clean between their teeth was for relieving the unpleasant sensation of having something stuck there. Evidence of toothpicks fashioned out of bronze has also been found in prehistoric graves.

### The toothpick tree

In Ancient Greece and Rome, the mastic tree was known as the "toothpick tree" because slivers of its wood were the most effective as toothpicks. The resin of the mastic tree, called mastix, was chewed for its cleaning, tooth-whitening and breath-freshening effects.



### Symbols of status and wealth

Thousands of years ago, using a toothpick in public was common, and in some cultures it was a symbol of status, wealth and hospitality.

### A toothpick fit for a king

A toiletry set containing a gold toothpick was found inside a king's tomb dating back to 3000 BCE in Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq). It was attached with golden wires to a ring, presumably for wearing, and had its own golden case decorated with filigree.



### Etiquette

In Ancient Rome (753 BCE to 476 CE), it was common for dinner guests to clean their teeth at the dinner table, and metal toothpicks were often provided alongside eating utensils like spoons and knives.

### Fashion accessories

Ornately decorated toothpicks made from precious metals were considered a symbol of wealth up until the 19th century. In Ancient China and Europe, toothpicks were made of bone, ivory or metal inlaid with gemstones and worn around the neck as pendants. It was also common for wealthy people to carry their own gold and silver toothpicks in cases to be used pretentiously after eating. Two royal examples are Queen Elizabeth I of England (1533–1603), who was gifted a set of six gold toothpicks and "tooth cloths" in 1570, and James IV of Scotland (1473–1513), who wore a gold toothpick suspended on a chain around his neck.





## Chewing sticks and spiritualism

Like the resin from the toothpick tree, chewing sticks made from the African and Middle Eastern *Salvadora persica* tree, known as the “toothbrush tree” because it contains natural chemicals that are beneficial to oral health, have been used for thousands of years. These chewing sticks, called miswak (or siwak), have a frayed end that is used like a toothbrush to clean the surface of the teeth. Muhammad of Islam (570–632 CE), founder of the Islamic religion, was an enthusiastic supporter of the custom, and for thousands of years the use of the miswak for many Muslims has been a habit that blends personal hygiene and spirituality.



## Trendy toothpicks

Massachusetts businessman Charles Forster is credited with the success of the American toothpick industry. During the mid-19th century, people purchased (or made) handcrafted toothpicks, but Forster patented the technology to make millions per year. In order to create a market for them in Boston, he hired Harvard students to demand toothpicks in restaurants and retail stores, then go there himself soon afterward to sell his wares. Soon, chewing on toothpicks became fashionable among the well-to-do of Boston, some of whom would stand outside of fancy restaurants with a toothpick in their mouth to give the appearance that they had just eaten there.

## A symbol of cool

“Crude, inconsiderate, and a show of bad manners” is what advice columnist Dear Abby thought about the habit of using toothpicks in public during the early part of the 20th century. This, of course, made it more appealing to many, and carrying a toothpick in your mouth became a sign of rebellion. Western popular culture icons like gangsters, cowboys and other tough guy types were often shown with a toothpick dangling from their mouth. To name a few, John Wayne, Clint Eastwood, Paul Newman and Sylvester Stallone have all played characters onscreen who chew on toothpicks. Today, film and television tough guy characters who chew on toothpicks often represent someone who has given up or is trying to give up smoking.



For smokers trying to kick the habit, toothpicks can soothe some of the symptoms of withdrawal and give the appearance of cool without the health implications. Flavoured toothpicks are recommended as tools to help quit smoking, and the iconic rebellious air they give has not been lost. Today, you can buy artisanal toothpicks flavoured with whisky, bacon, dill pickle and mustard or more traditional breath-freshening flavours like cinnamon or mint.

## Silken threads

New Orleans dentist Levi Spear Parmly (1790–1859) is credited as being the inventor of modern dental floss. In 1815, he began recommending the use of silk thread to clean between the teeth. He believed that flossing was the most important step of oral care, and his advice spread swiftly.

In 1882, the Codman and Shurtleff Company of Massachusetts began mass producing unwaxed silk floss, and in 1898, the Johnson & Johnson Company of New Jersey had secured a patent for dental floss.

Within a century, the idea of cleaning between the teeth with floss was common dental knowledge. Toothpicks were also commonly used.

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## Modern dental floss

When silk was in short supply during the Second World War, Dr. Charles C. Bass invented nylon dental floss. Nylon was not only more readily available, but it was also more durable, and for this improvement, as well as his extensive work in dental research, Dr. Bass is known as the “Father of Preventative Dentistry.”

The last 60 years have seen the invention of interdental brushes, designed to make cleaning between the teeth easier, as well as the development of dental tape for flossing, flavoured dental floss and floss designed for sensitive gums. [yoh](#)

# Did you know?

## Murder

Agathocles (361–289 BCE), the Greek tyrant of Syracuse and king of Sicily, died after using a wooden toothpick that had been soaked in poison by enemies.



During the 16th century, an order of nuns in Portugal supported themselves by making and selling sweets that stuck to the fingers and the teeth. To supplement their business, the nuns began making wooden toothpicks, so that their customers could clean their teeth afterward. The toothpicks were also helpful in picking up the sweets.

## Savvy business-women

## In the animal kingdom

Cleaning between the teeth is not just something humans do! Monkeys have been spotted using branches to clean between their teeth, just as our early human ancestors did, and a baboon in an English zoo was recently caught on camera using the bristles from a broom as toothpicks. Elephants eat trees for nourishment, but chewing on bark and branches also helps to clean their teeth — not unlike humans and their toothpicks!

Some birds act as living toothpicks for hippos and crocodiles, which open their mouths after eating and allow the brave birds to pick at food morsels left on and between their teeth. The birds get a meal, and the hippos and crocodiles get their teeth cleaned with little effort on their part. [yoh](#)



# Cancer and Oral Health Care

*By Maggie Blood*

Flossing is always important, especially when undergoing active cancer treatments



There has been a lot of speculation lately about the value of flossing for the average, healthy person. But in the case of someone battling a serious illness like cancer, not keeping up with daily flossing can create a whole series of other medical issues.

Let's be honest: some of us are real troopers when it comes to flossing on a daily basis, while others are far less motivated. We all know that flossing is critical to removing plaque and other debris from in between our teeth, and it's also a key habit to keep up with even when you are sick.

Inflamed gums can happen to any of us when we don't floss as often as we should, but it presents a particular danger to cancer patients. Dr. Deborah Saunders, Medical Director of the Dental Oncology Program at Northeast Cancer Centre/Health Sciences North in Sudbury, says it's especially important to keep flossing because "when the gums get inflamed from not flossing while undergoing cancer treatments, the result is bleeding from the gums that can become difficult to control," and this is quite serious if the body's clotting ability has been lowered from the cancer or treatments for it. There is another major issue cancer patients face if their oral care routine isn't maintained, says Dr. Saunders. "Unhealthy gums are also an open portal for bacteria hovering around the gum line to cause infections of the blood. While a healthy person can fight it, a cancer patient with a weakened immune system can encounter problems."

What happens when an infection sets in? According to Dr. Roger Sandre, Infectious Disease Specialist at Health Sciences North, patients with a weakened immune system are more prone to bacteria in the blood and the development of not only dental infections, but also infections in other organs. "If bacteria are not cleared from the blood, distant infections can occur such as infected heart valves."

If you are dealing with an illness or caring for a loved one who is, there are warning signs to let you know bacteria is getting out of control. Dr. Sandre says the most likely cause is a local odontogenic (originating in the tooth or surrounding tissues) infection that would include pain and swelling in the area of the infection and the formation of an abscess. Symptoms of distant infections include fever, chills, sweats, weight loss and possible joint pain and swelling, and back pain.

The moral of this story? Keep flossing, regardless of your health status. If you are diagnosed with an illness, be sure to consult with your dentist about how to keep up your mouth care regime and what the side effects of any prescribed medications could mean to your oral health. [ych](#)

## Test Your Blood Clotting Levels

To make sure it's safe for cancer patients to keep flossing, Dr. Saunders, Medical Director of the Dental Oncology Program at Northeast Cancer Centre/Health Sciences North in Sudbury, recommends picking a test floss site in your mouth. Start flossing in that one area, and if there is bleeding, time how long it takes for it to stop.

If the bleeding stops in less than two minutes, it's safe to keep flossing. If the bleeding continues past that timeline, stop flossing immediately and get in touch with your oncology team.

# The Space in Between

By Jennifer D. Foster

## Interdental cleaners and their role in oral health care

According to the Canadian Dental Association, “seven out of 10 Canadians will develop gum disease at some time in their lives. It is the most common dental problem, and it can progress quite painlessly until you have a real problem.” Prevention is key in fighting gum disease. Dr. David M. Stevenson, a dentist in Carleton Place and Vice-President of the Ontario Dental Association (ODA), says that “tooth brushing alone is not sufficient to ensure good oral health.” Cleaning between your teeth and around your gums is vital for removing plaque buildup (which contributes to tooth decay and gum disease) from areas your toothbrush just can’t reach. And that’s why using interdental cleaners, such as floss and interdental brushes, are an essential part of a good oral health routine, adults and kids included. Parents and caregivers should start flossing their child’s teeth as soon as at least two teeth are touching each other.

“The interdental spaces are the most vulnerable to dental disease, as these areas are not accessible by a person’s natural or ‘on-board’ methods of teeth-cleaning,” says Dr. Stevenson. “Our tongue, lips, cheeks and saliva help clean our teeth, but they’re not effective at removing plaque, and they cannot reach interdental spaces.” Interdental cleaners are needed for this purpose, he explains, “but they do present an added step or inconvenience, and this lack of use means that interdental spaces can often be the most neglected areas.” Dr. LouAnn Visconti, President-Elect of the ODA and an orthodontic specialist in Timmins, agrees, adding, “the anatomy of this area sets up the perfect environment for plaque to accumulate and for bacteria to thrive, thereby creating disease of the gum and tooth tissue.”



Not sure which interdental cleaners are best for your teenaged son, who has braces? Want an alternative to flossing? Wondering if irrigation devices are useful? Dr. Visconti says that when it comes to figuring out what will work best for each patient, dental professionals must consider a patient’s manual dexterity, any physical disabilities, age, the health of the gum tissue and the overall health of the patient, as well as the existence of dental appliances and any dental work. Read on for all you need to know about interdental cleaners.

### Interdental cleaners 101

**Dental floss:** There are many types of this interdental product used to clean between the teeth and below the gum line, commonly made from 35 strands of nylon that have been twisted together. With **waxed floss**, the standard nylon floss is covered with a light wax coating. This waxed form is less likely to break, but the wax coating may make it harder to use in tight spaces, and some complain that a waxy residue is left behind on their teeth. **Unwaxed floss** is ideal for flossing in tight areas, but it can be prone to shredding and breakage. **Dental tape** is a broader and flatter form of standard floss and can be waxed or unwaxed. It is ideal for those with teeth that are more spaced. **Super floss** is made from yarn-like material with a stiffer end, making it easier to clean under bridges and around braces/wires. **Floss threaders** are useful for cleaning around bridges, implants and orthodontic braces and retaining wires. The floss threader is a nylon



What type of interdental cleaner is best for me?



device that looks like a needle, and the floss is the thread that is inserted into the “eye” of the floss threader. The floss threader carries the floss between the teeth and around bridges, implants and orthodontic appliances.

Some floss products are made from the same material used to make Gore-Tex fabric products. This allows for easier flossing in extremely tight areas between the teeth, and the likelihood of shredding is reduced.

“Floss picks are a good beginner device to build kids’ skills with flossing.”

Overall, flossing is simple, portable, inexpensive and very effective for the majority of people. However, Dr. Visconti notes that a certain degree of manual dexterity and two clean hands are needed to achieve the maximum benefit of plaque removal below the gum line. And, adds Dr. Stevenson, “it is rather technique-sensitive, so any compromise reduces its effectiveness.”

#### Wooden stimulators/ wedges and toothpicks:

These are often used after meals to remove food caught between the teeth and to stimulate the gums. Dr. Visconti cautions against using standard toothpicks as “they can damage the gum tissue and carry bacteria, reintroducing it from one area in the mouth to the next.” And even though they are simple and easy to use, Dr. Stevenson notes they’re of limited use in removing plaque and can splinter if used too aggressively. These interdental tools can be used with one hand, and if used properly they are a good addition to flossing, but are not a replacement, warns Dr. Stevenson, adding “they’re great for people who have areas where food easily catches between their teeth.”



**Rubber-tipped stimulators:** Consisting of a rubber tip attached to the end of a metal or plastic handle, these devices remove plaque in between the teeth, and stimulate and massage gums. They’re easy to use with one hand, and while “they’re less effective at removing material from between the teeth, rubber-tipped stimulators are excellent tools to improve the health of the gums in chronically irritated areas, especially from orthodontic appliances, compromised fillings and dentures,” says Dr. Stevenson. Dr. Visconti notes they’re often used following gum surgery, as they have the ability to reshape the gum in between the teeth.

**Floss picks:** These convenient plastic devices have a small piece of floss between two posts at one end and often an interdental pick at the other end. Floss picks can be used with one hand, so not as much manual dexterity is required as with conventional floss. However, says Dr. Visconti, they may be more difficult to use in areas where spacing is tight. And due to their inflexible design, the floss can’t be wrapped around



the whole tooth surface in between the teeth and therefore some plaque/food may be left behind. Nonetheless, says Dr. Stevenson, “they’re excellent for people with dexterity problems or a very small mouth.” And, adds, Dr. Ian McConnachie, a pediatric dentist in Ottawa, “floss picks are a good beginner device to build kids’ skills with flossing.”

**Interdental brushes:** These cone-shaped soft-wire disposable brushes, often with a reusable handle, are designed to remove debris and plaque from between teeth and hard-to-reach areas. Easy to use with one hand, these brushes are good for those with limited dexterity, orthodontic appliances, bridges, implants and large spaces between their teeth. Dr. Stevenson says they’re less effective than floss in areas below the gum line,” and Dr. Visconti notes they’re more expensive than conventional floss, and the wire brush may damage gums.



**Irrigation devices:** Good for removing food and debris from large spaces and difficult-to-reach areas, these electric interdental devices are gentle on gums, “particularly in people with sensitive gums, where conventional flossing may irritate the gums,” says Dr. Visconti. They are also ideal for those with orthodontic appliances, as they can help flush out food from around the braces and wires, she says, and for those with gum disease, “as they can flush out the bacteria from deep pockets around the teeth, pockets that can’t be reached with conventional flossing.” And although a gentle stream of water usually acts as the irrigant, Dr. Stevenson says antimicrobial agents or other treatments can be used, as directed by a dental professional. The main disadvantage of these devices? They aren’t effective at removing plaque, as they primarily have a rinsing action only. “Plaque removal requires a mechanical contact action that is not achieved through the use of an irrigation device,” explains Dr. Stevenson. Other disadvantages? Cost — the tips must be changed every three to six months, and they are messy to learn how to use, requiring a sink, which makes them much less convenient than other interdental cleaners, notes Dr. Visconti.



#### The key to success

Essentially, the main goal is to help patients understand the importance of removing plaque from the spaces between their teeth, then assist them in choosing an interdental cleaner that works for them on a daily basis, explains Dr. Visconti. Dr. Stevenson agrees: “The key to a successful oral hygiene program is to make it a habit, then inconvenience and a lack of time are no longer factors; it simply becomes one of those things we always do.” And remember, he stresses, “if you have difficulty or questions regarding the use of interdental cleaners, then ask a dental professional. That’s what we’re here for!” [yoh](#)

# An Apple a Day...

*By Cheryl Embrett*

What you eat (or don't eat) makes a big difference when it comes to having a beautiful, healthy smile



When my daughter first saw the news reports on her iPhone questioning the effectiveness of flossing, she did her happy dance. Finally — an excuse to ditch one of her least-favourite nighttime rituals without feeling guilty. Or so she thought. The truth is, flossing, like regular tooth brushing and visits to the dentist, is essential to good oral health. “It remains a key piece for controlling plaque accumulation and, therefore, controlling gum disease,” says Dr. Ian McConnachie, a pediatric dentist in Ottawa.

Another key factor — and one my teen finds more palatable — is good nutrition. When it comes to a healthy, attractive smile, and good overall health in general, you really are what you eat (or don't eat). We all know we should strive for a well-balanced diet with plenty of fruits and veggies, and keep sugary treats to a minimum. But what else can we do keep our diet smile-friendly? We asked Toronto-based registered dietitian Julia Stanislavskaia and Dr. Sanjukta Mohanta, a dentist who works in a public health clinic in Brampton, to spill the beans.

### Include dairy in your diet

Milk, milk alternatives, yogurt (plain, with no added sugar), cheese and other dairy products are necessary for optimal oral health, says Dr. Mohanta, as they contain calcium and phosphorous, which strengthen teeth and bones. These foods have other tooth-friendly benefits, too. Milk and milk alternatives increase the pH level of our saliva, which helps prevent tooth decay. Cheese stimulates saliva production, which helps clear away food particles from your teeth, and it contains casein, which forms a thin, protective layer on the enamel. And the good bacteria in yogurt crowd out the bad bacteria in your mouth that cause tooth decay.

**TIP:** If you're not big on dairy, or are lactose-intolerant or vegan, calcium can be found in a variety of other foods and drinks, including almonds, white beans, cooked dark leafy greens, extra firm tofu and fortified drinks like soy milk and cashew or almond milk.



### Ditch the sugary beverages

While sports and energy drinks certainly sound healthy, they're generally high in sugar (one popular brand contains 40 grams in a 710 ml bottle!) and very acidic, which damages tooth enamel and leads to tooth sensitivity and decay. Juice is also high in sugar and acid, says Dr. Mohanta, as are soda and other flavoured drinks. "If you choose to drink them, drink them quickly so they're not on your teeth for long, then rinse your mouth with water afterward." The best drink for our teeth is, no surprise, fluoridated tap water, says Dr. Mohanta. "Fluoride makes our teeth stronger to resist decay, while water rinses away food particles."

**TIP:** If you find plain water boring, jazz it up by adding fresh or frozen fruit, flavouring it with herbs or trying a combination of the two.



### Lighten up

To keep those pearly whites gleaming, limit foods and drinks that cause surface stains, such as coffee, tea, red wine, cola, berries, curry and pasta sauces, advises Dr. Mohanta. As a rule, if you regularly consume something that would stain your clothes, it has the potential to stain your teeth, too.

**TIP:** Eating crunchy fruits and vegetables such as apples, broccoli and cucumbers, nibbling on cheese and drinking lots of water can help counter surface stains.

### Beware of so-called "healthy" snacks

Granola, energy bars and raisins sound healthy enough, but snacks that are gummy, sticky and gooey tend to stick in the pits and grooves of the teeth for a long period of time, and bacteria feast on the sugars. Dried fruit also sounds nutritious, but Stanislavskaja isn't a fan since it's also sticky and high in sugar.

**TIP:** Instead of dried fruit, try adding coconut chips to your trail mix. "You can get them dry-roasted — and some are even sriracha-flavoured or chocolate-covered, and they contain healthy fat and not much sugar," says Stanislavskaja. Pumpkin seeds and sunflower seeds are also good additions, as are roasted soy nuts.

### Bite into an apple

If you can't brush your teeth after a meal, eat an apple (or another crunchy fruit or veggie), instead. They act as natural tooth cleansers, since the chewing produces saliva in your mouth, which rinses away bacteria and food particles, and the fibrous texture of the fruits/veggies also stimulates the gums. Chewing sugar-free gum after eating also increases saliva production.

**TIP:** Xylitol gum reduces acid-producing bacteria, prevents it from sticking to teeth and increases the pH level in the mouth, decreasing the risk of tooth decay. Xylitol is also widely available in candy, mints, mouthwash, toothpaste and as a sweetener. [voh](#)



#### Instead of:

- Flavoured drinks
- Chips
- Pudding or ice cream
- Dessert
- Juice
- Sweetened cereal
- Chocolate spread



#### Choose this:

- Water or white milk
- Nuts or popcorn
- Yogurt or unsweetened applesauce
- Fruit, cheese
- Water, fruit
- Low-sugar cereal, toast, oatmeal
- Peanut butter



# Good Oral Health Starts Early

By Cheryl Embrett



When my teen was a tot I remember thinking, “Why all the fuss about baby teeth when they’re going to fall out, anyway?” My dentist was quick to assure me that if those first little nubs aren’t cared for properly, they can decay and that affects the spacing of permanent teeth. To give your children an early start on good oral health habits, follow these tried-and-true tips from Dr. Ian McConnachie, a pediatric dentist in Ottawa, and Dr. Sanjukta Mohanta, a dentist who works in a public health clinic in Brampton.



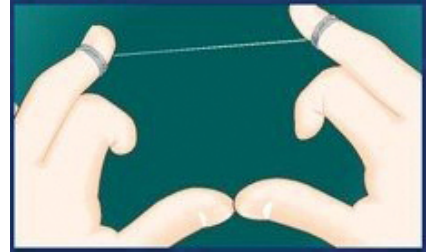
- Talk to your dentist about the best time to schedule your child’s first dental visit. The Canadian Dental Association recommends that a child’s first dental checkup take place by age one or within six months of the first tooth appearing.
- Don’t let your child fall asleep with a bottle or sippy cup filled with juice or milk. Those sugary liquids (yes, even milk contains sugar) can pool in Junior’s mouth and cause tooth decay.
- Wipe baby’s gums with gauze or a clean, damp cloth after each feeding. Once that first tooth appears, use a soft, infant-sized toothbrush and a smear (the size of a grain of rice) of toothpaste. For children over the age of three, a small green pea-sized portion of fluoridated toothpaste is plenty. Teach your child to spit the toothpaste out or use a soft cloth to wipe it from his or her mouth.
- Children need help with brushing and flossing until they reach approximately seven years of age, says Dr. McConnachie. “From a brushing standpoint, it may just be a matter of parents checking their children’s skills from time to time once they’ve demonstrated the ability to do a good, thorough job. From a flossing standpoint, it’s a dexterity issue. It’s very difficult for a young child to use the floss properly, so it’s best that parents are there doing the flossing.”
- Start flossing your child’s teeth as soon as at least two teeth are touching each other. In most cases, this means flossing should begin around the first birthday, says Dr. Mohanta. To make it easier, lay the child down and occupy him with a toy, book or tablet, while you floss his teeth.
- If your child is keen to try flossing herself, that’s great that she’s showing an interest, says Dr. McConnachie. “We have a very significant number of our kids who are diligent about oral hygiene, including flossing. Let them do it, but with some supervision. And then you may have to supplement.”
- Many parents aren’t knowledgeable about the proper flossing technique, says Dr. McConnachie. “If your dental team isn’t offering to demonstrate and work with you to develop those skills, you should feel very comfortable saying, ‘Look, can you please give me a hand? Do you have any tips?’”
- Brush at least twice a day (after breakfast and before bedtime) for two to three minutes each time and floss at least once a day. Cool gear (a *Frozen* electric toothbrush, *My Little Pony* toothpaste and *Angry Birds* flossers, for example) can help get your child excited about brushing and flossing.



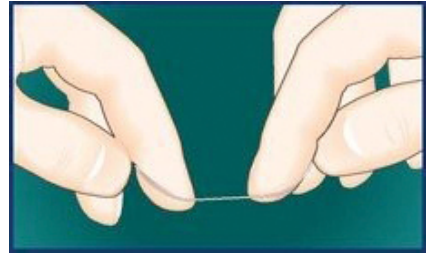


# Tips for **Flossing**

**Step 1:** Take a length of floss equal to the distance from your hand to your shoulder.



Wrap it around your index and middle fingers, leaving about two inches between your hands.



**Step 2:** Slide the floss between your teeth and wrap it into a "C" shape around the base of the tooth and gently under the gumline. Wipe the tooth from base to tip two or three times.



**Step 3:** Be sure to floss both sides of every tooth. Don't forget the backs of your last molars. Go to a new section of the floss as it wears and picks up particles.



# The Ins and Outs of Flossing

By Donna Paris

## We all have questions. So here's everything you need to know about flossing your teeth

Let's face it, flossing can be awkward. Spaces between teeth can be tight, sometimes bits of food come flinging out and it's hard to know if you're doing it right. Sometimes you wonder if you should even bother. The short answer? Yes, absolutely!

"Flossing effectively can be a comfortable process, with the right technique," says ODA Vice-President Dr. Stevenson, who operates a dental practice in Carleton Place, just outside of Ottawa. "Some people have crowded or shifted teeth and this may mean that the standard flossing technique may need some modification; they need to ask their dentist or dental hygienist, who can help them find a method and type of floss that's comfortable and effective."

And the benefits are well worth the effort: flossing can help prevent bad breath, cavities — and even gum disease. We've compiled a list of questions about flossing, then asked a few top dentists for all the answers.

### Q: Why is flossing important?

Flossing is just one of the tools that someone can use to help clean his or her teeth, and it's an effective preventive measure to remove plaque, the main cause of tooth decay and gum disease. "Flossing properly is the best way to clean the angles between your teeth where they contact each other, and they do need to be cleaned to help prevent gum disease or tooth decay," says Dr. Stevenson.

### Q: Is it possible that flossing can prevent a cavity that has already started to form?

Surprisingly, yes! "When decay is confined to the enamel, the tooth doesn't need to be restored. It's only when the decay progresses through to the dentin that it requires treatment, and flossing can help prevent this. "With the help of fluoride, it can actually remineralize the area back to normal," says ODA President Dr. Jack McLister, who's an instructor at Western University in London.

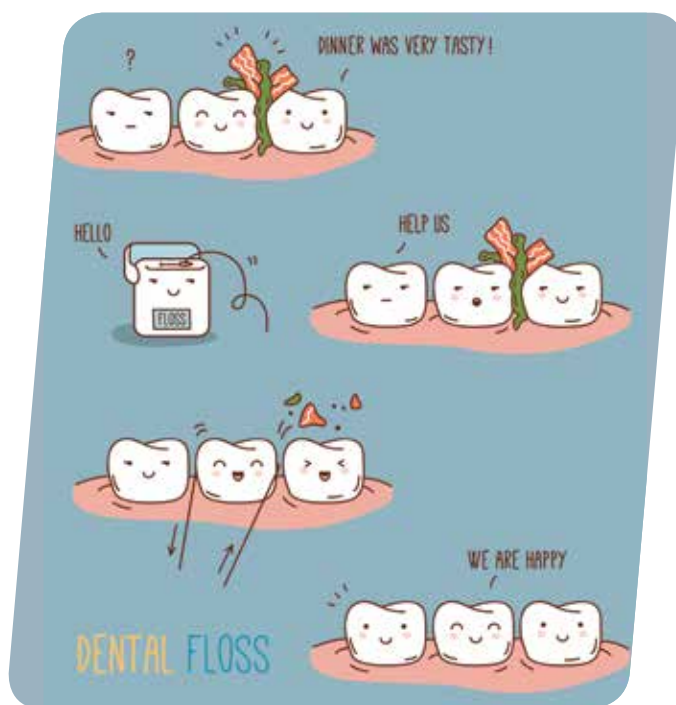
### Q: How often do you really need to floss?

The Canadian Dental Association recommends flossing at least once a day. "But don't let guilt get the better of you — three to four times a week is better than not at all," says Dr. Stevenson.

### Q: Brush, then floss? Or the other way around? Rinse before or after flossing?

Most dentists recommend flossing before brushing. The floss will remove the plaque between the teeth and those hard-to-get-places that a toothbrush can't reach; it moves the plaque to the tooth surface, where you can then remove it with your toothbrush.

Mouth rinses often contain fluoride or other antibacterial agents that perform best when in direct contact with clean teeth. Therefore, it's best to rinse after brushing.



### Best excuses:

"I once had a patient tell me that they did not like to floss because 'the stuff that came out from between my teeth was disgusting.' My reply: 'Exactly! That's the point of flossing!'"

— Dr. Stevenson

## Q: Can flossing damage teeth?

Proper flossing cannot damage your teeth and it shouldn't be painful, either. But, according to the American Dental Association, if you floss too aggressively, you could damage the tissue between your teeth. The best course of action is to see your dentist for advice.

## Q: Honestly, who's got time to floss?

There is no strict rule when to floss — do it when you have the time. "It doesn't have to be just before bedtime, when you are tired and every second of delay before sleep creates frustration," says Dr. Stevenson. In fact, Cam Newton, an NFL quarterback, was recently seen on TV flossing on the sideline during a game. "I hope his dentist was watching!" he adds.

## Q: Are there different kinds of floss?

Monofilament and multifilament are different types of traditional floss. Monofilament is generally smoother and slides between teeth easier than multifilament, but it is also more slippery to hold. Threaded picks or forks can be very helpful for people who have difficulty with the dexterity required to floss properly. But the disadvantage of using them over the longer pieces of floss is that the plaque removed from one site in the mouth is reintroduced into another part because of the short length of floss. With a longer piece, the floss can be moved along using a new part of the floss for each site.

## Q: Is it necessary for kids to floss?

"It is necessary to floss a child's teeth, and it's almost never too early to begin," says ODA President-Elect Dr. LouAnn Visconti, an orthodontist in Timmins. "Baby teeth begin to erupt at about six months of age, and as soon as two adjacent teeth appear, it is time to begin flossing." Parents will also have to floss a child's teeth up until they have developed the manual dexterity and co-ordination to be able to do so themselves (age eight or nine), she adds.

As well, many people believe that flossing isn't necessary if there is spacing between the baby teeth. "However, flossing is important, whether there is spacing or not, as plaque forms on the tooth surfaces," says Dr. Visconti.

### Best excuses:

"I have heard a few excuses, such as: 'I cannot floss... it makes my gums bleed!' and 'I really only care about my front teeth, so I will just floss those!' and 'I cannot floss because my dog ate my floss.'"

— Dr. Visconti

## Q: Is it necessary to floss if you have orthodontic work?

Yes. Braces present a perfect place where bacteria and food can lodge and can become more difficult to remove. "In addition to causing gum disease, leaving plaque behind around the braces may cause permanent discoloration of the tooth enamel ranging from white spots to brown or black decay," says Dr. Visconti. (White spots are the start of the cavity process and are due to the demineralization of the tooth enamel.) [yoh](#)

### Best flossing technique

1. Take a length of floss equal to the distance from your hand to your shoulder. Wrap it around your index and middle fingers, leaving about two inches between your hands.
2. Slide the floss between your teeth and wrap it into a "C" shape around the base of the tooth and gently under the gum line. Wipe the tooth from base to tip two or three times. "Do not see-saw back and forth; gently partially wrap the floss around the tooth and gently slide the floss up and down," says Dr. McLister.
3. Be sure to floss both sides of every tooth, and don't forget the backs of your last molars. Go to a new section of the floss as it wears and picks up particles.

### Best flossing technique if you have orthodontic treatment

When braces are bonded to the teeth, a wire is placed in the mouth that fits into the slots of the braces; it is the wire that moves and straightens the teeth. "With the wire in place, it is then impossible to floss the teeth as one normally would because the wire prevents this, so the flossing technique is different," says Dr. Visconti. "Feed the end of the floss underneath the wire to floss under the gums between the teeth." Some floss comes with a stiff end, so that it's easier to feed the end of the floss under the wire and pull it through to floss with the softer end.

# Quacks and Tramps: A Brief History of Dentistry in Canada

By Catherine Morana

Dentistry has come a long way from its grim days of tooth-pulling by blacksmiths, farmers and other local town tradespeople



The Ontario Dental Association (ODA) turns 150 years young in 2017. And to honour this milestone, we're taking a look back at the early days of dentistry in Canada and the roots of the ODA.

Today, patients can expect a hygienic, professional visit to their dentist's office. But it wasn't always this way. There were few cities in Canada in the early 1800s, and the country's population was largely made up of farmers scattered across the land. Dentists were scarce, and those with toothaches turned to the local "tooth-puller." Early pioneer accounts reveal that tooth-pulling could be offered by any craftsmen who had instruments. In rural areas, some farmers gained a reputation as a dental specialist, simply because they'd had some luck extracting teeth with an instrument they'd made. One account states that "it was not uncommon for a plain and simple farmer, with no pretension to a knowledge of medicine or surgery, to acquire a reputation as a specialist in some particular branch of the profession."<sup>1</sup>



*The Country Tooth Drawer, circa 1812 – 17.*  
Courtesy of the British Dental Association Museum.

In towns, wagon makers, druggists, candy makers, gunsmiths and blacksmiths frequently offered to pull teeth on their premises, in addition to their usual trade. Hygiene was never a priority. Teeth were usually removed by a device called a turn-key, which was used until the mid-1880s in Canada. It was later replaced by the forceps.



Turn-key from the University of Toronto,  
Museum of Dentistry.  
Photo by Catherine Solmes.

Professionally trained dentists were few and far between in the mid-1800s, and there was only one dental college in North America, which was in Baltimore. Anyone seeking a proper education as a dentist would learn the trade serving as an apprentice to a practising dentist. Apprenticeships were a trend that arose in France, with the publication of the textbook *Le Chirurgien dentiste (The Surgeon Dentist)* by Pierre Fauchard, a dentist from Paris. His knowledge and observations improved the practice of dentistry, making it a more scientific and health-related profession that encouraged the sharing of information and improved the opportunity to learn dentistry.

By 1867, there were two types of dentists in Canada: those who had some form of dental training and scientific knowledge and "quack" or "tramp" dentists.<sup>2</sup> Quack dentists would go from town to town, setting themselves up at public fairs or visiting local hotels or steamers, employing ridiculous claims and carnival tactics in order to draw a crowd. Their advertisements offered "painless dentistry" and low-priced extractions. Some even borrowed the name of a good dentist, duping their patients! And many patients suffered horribly at the hands of these quacks.





A quack advertisement from a Hamilton newspaper, 1843.

Reputable members of the profession hated the tactics of these quacks. Not only were they a danger to the public, but they also harmed the reputation of trained dentists everywhere. In 1866, Barnabas Day, a doctor from Queen's Medical College in Kingston, who was also trained as a dentist, decided to change all this.

He called for a meeting in Toronto, aiming to seek legislation and proper standards to control how dentistry was practised. He contacted all the dentists he knew, and on January 3, 1867, nine dentists attended a meeting at the Queen's Hotel in Toronto. Those present included dentists Francis Callender of Cobourg, John O'Donnell and J. Stuart Scott, MD, of Peterborough, Henry Wood of Picton, Antoine Lalonde of Brockville, Curtis Chittenden and D. A. Bogart from Hamilton and Martin E. Snider of Toronto — and the Ontario Dental Association was formed. Their first task? Drafting a bill to regulate dentistry. News spread, and when the organization met again in Cobourg in July 1867, more than 60 dentists from across the province attended the meeting. A draft of the bill was read and approved by all.



Gabriel Gostiaux, *Monsieur Sans-Douleur, Dentiste et Pedicure*, 1868, France.

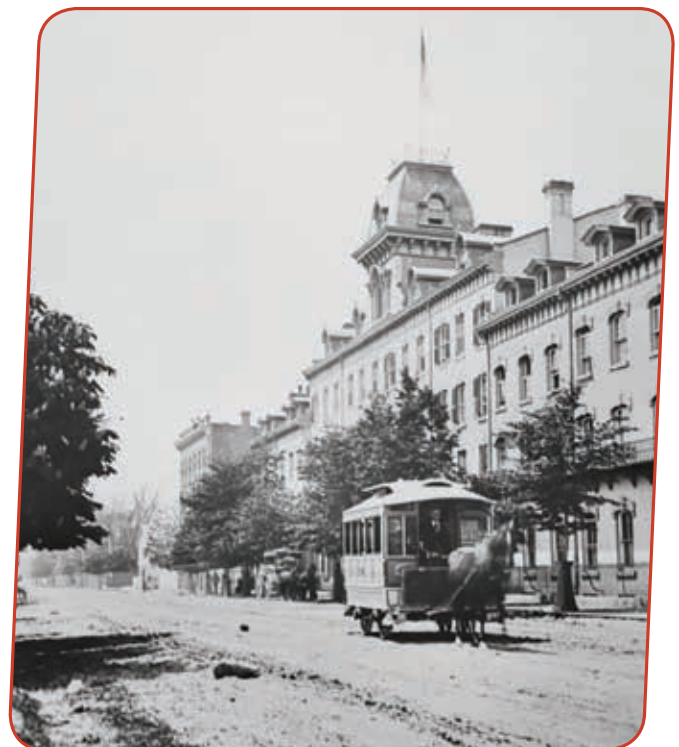
By January 1868, the ODA had collected 100 signatures in a petition they would send to the Ontario Legislature with a draft of their proposed bill. An *Act Respecting Dentistry* became law on March 3, 1868, and full powers of regulating and licensing were given to the Royal College of Dental Surgeons of Ontario. It was the first legislation in the world to grant self-regulation to dentists. Now, anyone who practised dentistry without a licence could be fined \$20.

The act was revised in 1870. Dental students now had to pass an entry examination and train for three years as an apprentice with a licensed dentist. At the end of their apprenticeship, dental students had to pass a final exam before becoming licensed to practise dentistry.

An *Act Respecting Dentistry* served as the key model for other dental organizations seeking dental legislation across North America. In 1875, Dr. J. Branston Willmott would boast in a letter to his dental colleagues in New York that it was the best Act in force anywhere. Not only was Ontario attracting better applicants, but he also believed the Act had raised the standards of the profession and improved the overall theory and practice of dentistry.

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2. Shosenberg, Dr. James W. *The Rise of the Ontario Dental Association; 125 Years of Organized Dentistry*. Toronto: Ontario Dental Association, 1992, pp. 4, 8.



Nine dentists would meet at the Queen's Hotel, Toronto (now occupied by the Fairmont Royal York Hotel).

# Quiz

## A toothsome test to get your tongue wagging

By donalee Moulton

Plaque, bristles, flossing and the tooth fairy.  
We've come up with some questions to cut your teeth on.



### 1. How often should you brush your teeth?

- a) Every year on your birthday;
- b) After every meal; or
- c) Before company comes to visit.

### 2. I'm not a grown-up. Why do I need to floss?

- a) Because Santa is watching – and he's making a list;
- b) Because it's fun; or
- c) Because if you don't floss, more than one-third of your tooth surface is not cleaned.

### 3. What is plaque?

- a) The stuff that makes your teeth feel fuzzy;
- b) What you get when your soccer team wins second place; or
- c) A 2014 Australian horror film about a deadly disease.

### 4. Oops, a tooth just popped out – and it's not a baby tooth. What should you do?

- a) Put it in a tissue and email the tooth fairy;
- b) Store the tooth in cold milk and call your dentist right away; or
- c) Save it to give to your grandmother on her birthday.

### 5. What's the best way to brush your teeth?

- a) With a toothbrush that has soft bristles;
- b) With your Mom or Dad's hairbrush; or
- c) With your finger and lots of toothpaste.

### 6. You're hungry. What's the best snack?

- a) Cotton candy;
- b) Toffee; or
- c) A big red apple.

### 7. How many types of teeth do you have?

- a) Just one – fangs;
- b) Thirty-two – all my teeth are unique, like fingerprints;
- c) Four: incisors, canines, premolars and molars.

Answers

1. Ideally, you should brush your teeth after every meal. At the very least, brush once a day and always before you go to bed. A thorough brushing should take a minimum of two to three minutes, and you should wait at least 20 to 30 minutes after eating before brushing your teeth.
2. Flossing helps you clean between your teeth and below the gum line, areas that your toothbrush can't reach. It's recommended that you floss at least once a day. And flossing can be fun (answer b). See how many words you can think of that rhyme with "fun" or sing your favourite song to yourself while you're flossing.
3. Plaque is a type of clear bacteria that sticks to your teeth and can cause cavities. Brushing your teeth helps to get rid of plaque on the surface of your teeth, and flossing helps to get rid of plaque in areas where your toothbrush can't reach.

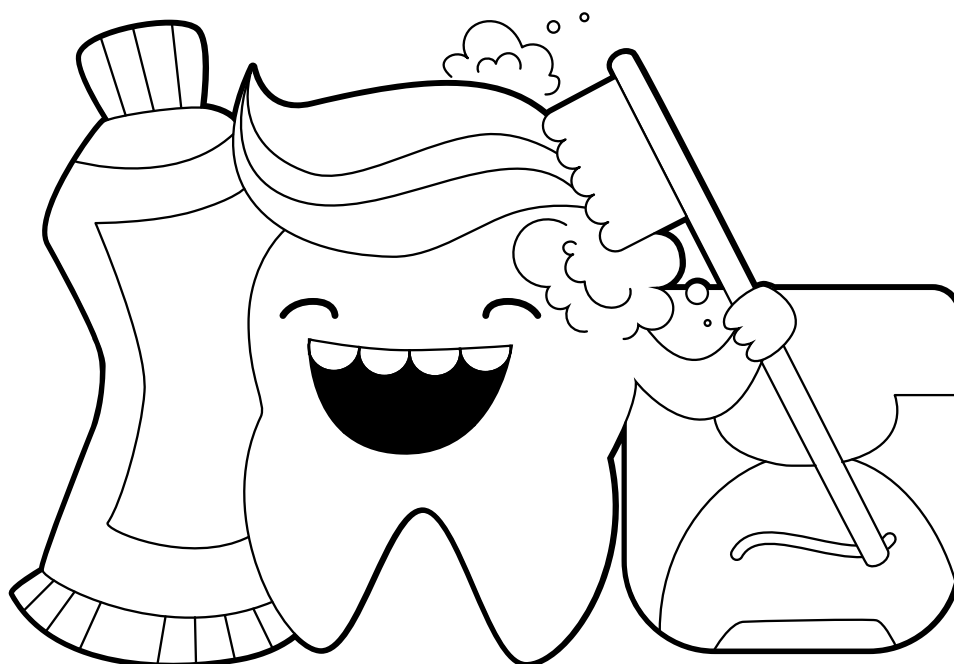
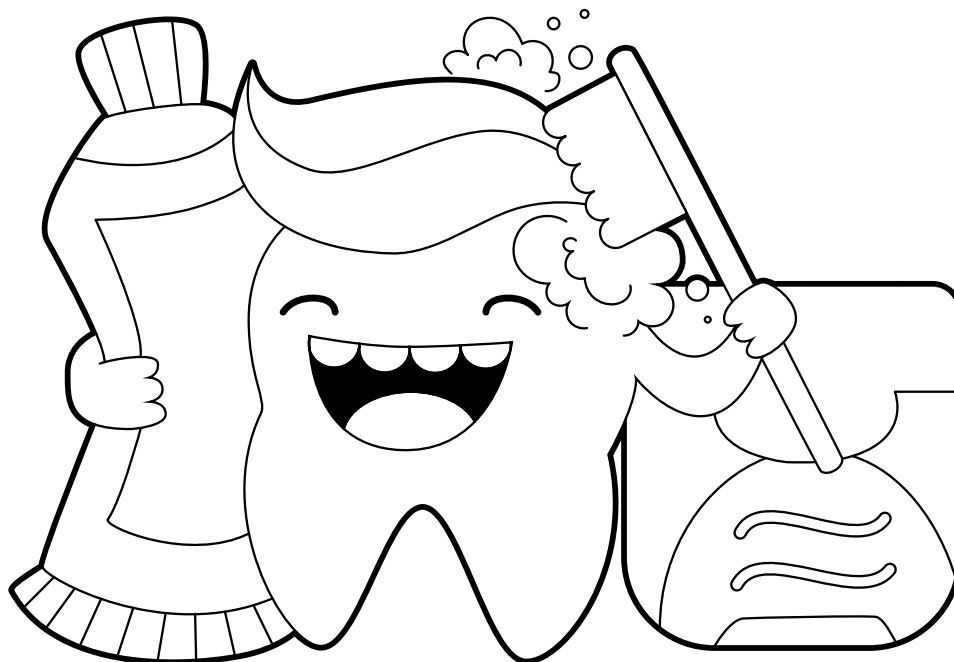
4. b) We're sure both the tooth fairy and your grandmother would be thrilled to see your tooth, but it's important to save it. Contact your dentist immediately, and in the meantime, placing the tooth in cold milk, or a sterile saline solution (like some eye drops), may help preserve the tooth until you can see your dentist.
5. a) A toothbrush with soft bristles is safest for your teeth. It won't damage your gums, your teeth's enamel or the root surface of your teeth.
6. c) Cotton candy is high in sugar and can help cause cavities. Toffee is also high in sugar and can get stuck in your teeth. But an apple tastes great – and it's good for you. Other healthy snacks for your body and your mouth include cheese, plain yogurt and whole-grain crackers.
7. c) Your teeth have different jobs to do, and they even look different from one another for this reason. Incisors, your front teeth, are the sharpest. Their main job is to cut food. Molars, at the back of your mouth, grind food into smaller pieces. In between are the canines, which grasp and tear food, and the premolars, used to crush food.



# Dental

## Spot the Difference Game

Can you find the five differences?



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