

The Massachusetts Dental Society (MDS) is pleased to make this publication available to our member dentists as a way of communicating important oral health information to their patients.

Information in **WORD OF MOUTH** articles comes from dental health care professionals of the MDS and other leading professional dental organizations, including the American Dental Association. If you have any questions about specific content that may affect your oral health, please contact your dentist. For more information regarding oral health, please visit the Public Resources section of the MDS website at [massdental.org](http://massdental.org).

Your comments and suggestions regarding **WORD OF MOUTH** are always welcome. All correspondence and requests for additional copies may be sent to:

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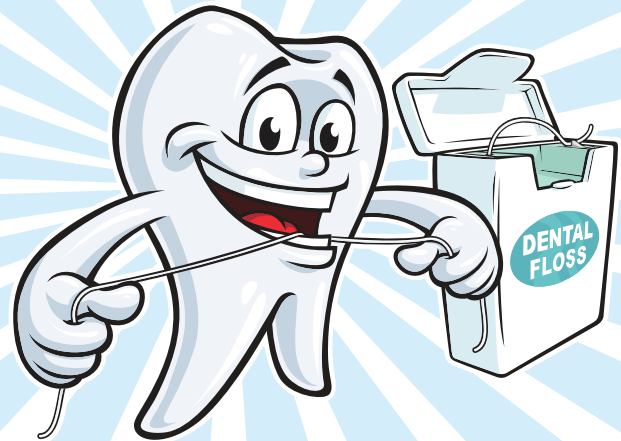
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# FLOSSophy® 101



It's never too early to start learning about the importance of maintaining healthy teeth and gums. The oral health lesson plan for children includes how often to brush their teeth (twice a day with fluoride toothpaste) and when to visit the dentist (twice a year for checkups and dental cleanings). But brushing and dental cleanings aren't the only important items on the anti-cavity curriculum. One other oral health habit on the list goes a long way to achieving your optimum oral health: flossing. The Massachusetts Dental Society's Dental FLOSSophy® educates children on the importance of flossing every day and demonstrates the proper way to floss.



## Why?

Why is flossing so important? The problem is plaque. Certain types of bacteria found in some foods stick to the enamel that covers your teeth and then can grow into a white film called plaque. If plaque is not removed from your teeth, cavities could start to develop. Brushing your teeth at least twice a day helps get rid of some of this plaque because toothbrushes are great at cleaning the tops, sides, fronts, and backs of teeth; however, plaque and food particles can also stick to the areas between teeth, in places where a toothbrush can't reach. Thankfully, flossing helps to get rid of that hard-to-reach plaque.

## When?

To effectively prevent cavities, flossing should begin at a very early age, which is as soon as any two teeth in the mouth touch, according to experts from the Massachusetts Dental Society and American Dental Association. For infants and toddlers, that means that a parent or adult will need to take charge. The parent should place the child in his or her lap, facing the parent, and use the flossing technique detailed below. As soon as children are old enough to hold the floss properly, they can floss their own teeth. Older children may still need assistance, so parents should plan to supervise their child's flossing.

## How?

Now that you've learned about why and when you should floss, it's time to take a course on how to floss your teeth. It's important to remember that learning to floss properly takes time, patience, and practice. For kids just beginning to floss, it's a good idea for a parent or other adult to be there to help.

Not sure how to start? Learn the ABCs of the Dental FLOSSophy:

- A.** Begin with about 18 inches of floss and wind it tightly around both index fingers. With your index fingers and thumbs, gently use a back-and-forth motion to glide the floss between the teeth.
- B.** Next, curve the floss into a C-shape and slide it into the space between the gum and tooth until you feel some resistance. Then, gently bring the floss up against the side of the tooth. Be careful not to floss too hard. Make sure to do this both in front of and behind the contact where teeth meet.
- C.** Repeat this between each tooth. And don't forget to floss the teeth that are in the back of your mouth!

For optimum oral health, you should floss once a day for two to three minutes, taking the time to floss between every tooth. With practice, by the time you're eight years old, you should be able to floss without help from an adult. If you have braces, carefully pull waxed floss between the wire and teeth and floss around each tooth using the above steps.



**The Dental FLOSSophy is all about good dental habits. So do your homework: Brush your teeth at least twice a day, visit your dentist regularly for checkups, and remember to floss your teeth once a day.**

