

# Flossing- A Myth or Reality: A Review

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## ABSTRACT

Dentists have advised us to brush our teeth at least twice and floss daily since many years. There is a controversy that is making headlines these days that there are no benefits of Flossing. Is it really true? The evidence which is collected from systemic reviews and meta-analyses have demonstrated weak evidence on the efficiency of flossing. The actual status is that the flossing efficacy has never been studied properly. This review article will highlights that flossing is actually beneficial or not.

**KEYWORDS:** Dentist, Flossing, Plaque

## INTRODUCTION

Dental floss is a controversial technology used to remove food particles and dental plaque from areas between the teeth. Despite the fact that the number of interdental cleaning aids are available, the use of dental floss has received much attention, though it require high level of manual dexterity. It has been widely accepted that the use of floss has a favorable effect on plaque removal and disease prevention. The American Dental Association reports that up to 80% of plaque can be eliminated with this method.<sup>1,2</sup>

Dental floss was originally used in medieval times to hold catapult arms down. When they wanted to fire, they would cut the floss and the arm would swing and the projectile would go flying. It wasn't until the 1960s that it was discovered that dental floss could be used to clean teeth. At this time, most floss was coated in lead to make it highly durable and water resistant. This was discontinued because it killed people. A few decades later women decided to use the floss in their knitting.<sup>1</sup>

There existed a conspiracy between the American Dental Association and the United States String Company. The agreement was that dentist would tell patients that floss was not only useful but essential to healthy teeth. In doing so the string company made huge profits giving benefits to the dentists and putting their name on their boxes.<sup>1,2</sup>

## IS FLOSSING A MYTH OR A REALITY ?

There is a little proof that flossing works still dental organizations and manufacturers of floss have pushed the practice for decades. The department of health and human services and agriculture looked at the most rigorous

research conducted over the past decade, focusing on 25 studies that generally compared the use of a toothbrush with the combination of toothbrushes and floss. The findings reported that the evidence of flossing is weak, unreliable and carries a moderate to large potential for bias.<sup>3,4</sup>

Dentists who stand by flossing insists that studies have not followed subjects long enough to show true benefits. Most studies last a few weeks or months and periodontal disease is a slow creeping offender that develops from poor oral hygiene. The Cochrane research also pointed out that only time will be able to tell if there are real dental benefits of flossing. Recent research has also shown that floss causes allergic reactions. Patients reported with loose and bleeding gums problems after doing regular flossing.

Healthy mouths are one exception where flossing is appropriate. Healthy mouths are one exception where flossing is more appropriate. There are patients who actually like to floss and have the manual dexterity to manage the skill. Some patients do not have space to accommodate interdental cleaning brushes and there are plenty of aids available that can be offered in those circumstances besides floss.<sup>5</sup>

Dental organizations are striving to offer alternative ways to maintain good oral health. It includes the following methods:<sup>6,7,8</sup>

**1. Interdental Cleaning Aids:** The British Society of Dental Hygiene and Therapy says despite the lack of evidence that flossing works, it is still worth trying to get something new, as interdental brushes can remove plaque from areas that cannot be reached by brushing alone.

**2. Water Picks:** Water picks are a high- pressure jet of water to dislodge the plaque, but it is a slightly more expensive option. However, one disadvantage is that the

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strength of the waterstream may wash away the fluoride protection from the toothpaste.

**3. Visiting the dental office regularly:** The only way to remove plaque is to scrape it off, for which a visit to a dentist is required. However according to the research done by Cochrane showed that scaling and polishing is inconclusive in reducing inflammation of gums.

**4. Brushing with electric toothbrush:** Brushing the teeth regularly using fluoride toothpaste is still the best way to clean the teeth, according to the Guardian, but one interesting point to note is that electric toothbrush has been found to reduce plaque build-up more effectively and prevent gum inflammation better than regular toothbrushes.

## CONCLUSION

Before we toss floss out of daily oral hygiene regimen, it is so early to imply that flossing is not an important step in maintaining healthy teeth but we are lacking concrete evidence. Dental people who stand by flossing insisted on the view that studies have insisted that studies have not followed subjects long enough to produce beneficial effects. Dentists recommend flossing to prevent not only gingival diseases but also problems like halitosis and bleeding on probing.

In fact it is not even about flossing, it is more important about cleaning between our teeth. Most of the patients resulted in more open areas between their teeth. In fact for these patients, floss is not the most appropriate way to clean between the teeth therefore inter-proximal brushes are more effective to remove plaque from the teeth.

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