

Green Day Every Day

You're brushing your teeth at least twice a day for two minutes, using fluoride toothpaste, and flossing regularly. That's all good stuff for your mouth (and your overall health), but did you know that while you're being good to your oral health, you could also be good to our planet?

Every day, the average person in the United States uses more than 50 gallons of water, according to the U.S. Geological Survey. Over the course of a year, that same person uses 107,000 gallons of water for everything from showering to flushing the toilet to washing dishes to, yes, brushing his or her teeth.

It may surprise you to learn that if you let the faucet run while you brush your teeth, you're using 2 gallons of water—every time you brush your teeth. That's like pouring two of those big jugs of bottled water right down the drain. That seems like a lot of water when you put it that way, doesn't it? But by just turning the faucet off while you brush your pearly whites, you can save up to 2 gallons of water during each brushing session. The same is true when you wash your face or shave. So think about how much water you'll be saving by just turning off the tap while you brush—and you can save

even more water by filling a glass with water and using that to rinse with after you're done brushing.

Don't Flush the Floss

On the one hand, it's good news that you're flossing your teeth; your gums and your dentist will love you for that. But you want to be careful not to get into the bad habit of flushing your used dental floss down the toilet because that can have serious ramifications for the environment. According to an article in the *Journal of the Canadian Dental Association*, dental floss that is flushed down the toilet wreaks havoc on wastewater treatment facilities.

The Toronto Water Authority conducted a campaign last year to alert the public to problems associated with flushing shred-resistant dental floss, which often forms softball-sized clumps that jam machinery at water treatment plants.

So, while it's important to continue flossing your teeth, it's a good idea to remember to throw used floss away rather than flushing it down the toilet.

Tossing Your Toothbrush?

Floss isn't the only discarded dental item that can wreak potential havoc on the environment. Nonbiodegradable toothbrushes can also be problematic. According to an article in *Natural Health* magazine, if every American changes toothbrushes every three months—which is the recommendation of the American Dental Association, since worn-out toothbrushes aren't as effectual for cleaning your teeth properly and can become rife with bacteria—that will add up to nearly 100 million pounds of landfill waste.

However, the article states that there are several companies that manufacture toothbrushes made from recycled material such as yogurt cups or that will take your old toothbrush and reprocess the plastic and use it to create other items, such as planters, decking, and benches. Check out **www.greenfeet.com** for more information.

When it comes to preserving the Earth's resources, every little bit helps.

If you have more questions about your oral health, contact the Massachusetts Dental Society at **(800) 342-8747** or visit our Web site at **www.massdental.org**.