

# TOOTH "PICKS"

## Bacon-Flavored Floss?

For a few years now, toothpaste manufacturers have been expanding their product lines beyond the old standby mint toothpaste to include a variety of flavors—citrus, berry, grape, and bubblegum, to name a few—all in the interest of encouraging children and adults to brush their teeth more. So it may not be too much of a stretch to find flavored dental floss on the market. But several new gag gifts are being marketed as dental floss products that you may want to avoid.

A line of floss can now be found online in flavors such as bacon and cupcake frosting. While these fun flavors may encourage you to floss more often, be warned that neither contains fluoride, the cavity-fighting ingredient found in many dental flosses manufactured by oral health care companies.



## Don't Get Diver's Mouth

Do you scuba? If so, you may want to see your dentist first because this sport can lead to jaw joint and/or tooth pain and gum tissue problems. "Diver's mouth syndrome" is a condition that is caused by the mouthpiece and the air pressure change involved in scuba diving, according to the Academy of General Dentistry. Divers may be initially unaware of the discomfort in their mouths that is caused by an ill-fitting mouthpiece, but when they finish their dive, they may notice jaw joint pain or gum lacerations.

## "Cankering" for Some Licorice?

Canker sores can be uncomfortable and unsightly, but an unlikely root plant may provide relief. A study published last fall in *General Dentistry* reported that licorice-laced adhesive patches given to 23 adults suffering from canker sores led to a faster recovery. Seven days after application, sores grew significantly smaller and less painful, while study members who'd received no treatment saw their sores increase by 13 percent. It's believed that stress and hormonal changes often cause canker sores, and licorice helps to knit the tissue back together and heal the sore. Keep in mind that the licorice used in this study was in its more natural state, not the red twisty sticks you find at the movie theater. Glycyrrhizin, one of the main components found in licorice, is believed to contribute to the herb's healing properties. Laboratory studies have reported that glycyrrhizin reduces inflammation, according to the University of Maryland Medical Center.

## Chew Smart

WORD OF MOUTH has previously touted the oral health benefits of chewing gum. In a nutshell, the act of chewing produces saliva, which helps wash away harmful bacteria on the teeth. But a 2008 Australian study hypothesizes that chewing gum has other health benefits as well, including relief from stress and anxiety and an increase in alertness. The study's gum chewers showed a reduction in anxiety compared to non-gum chewers by nearly 17 percent during mild stress and 10 percent during moderate stress, while 19 percent showed improvement in alertness over non-gum chewers. Just remember to chew sugar-free gum or gum containing xylitol, a natural sweetener that has been shown to dramatically reduce cavities.

## Another Reason to Go "Green"

The health benefits of drinking green tea have long been promoted. Its health benefits have been linked to weight loss, heart health, and cancer prevention. And a recent study in the *Journal of Periodontology* indicates that the tasty beverage may help promote healthy teeth and gums, as well. Researchers analyzed the periodontal (gum) health of 940 men and found that those who regularly drank green tea had superior periodontal health to subjects who consumed less. The study's authors believe that the secret weapon is the presence of an antioxidant called catechin. Antioxidants have been shown to reduce inflammation in the body, and it is suggested that by interfering with the body's inflammatory response to periodontal bacteria, green tea may actually help promote periodontal health.

## For Whiter Teeth, Stop "Wine-ing"

All you oenophiles out there may already know that drinking red wine can increase your risk for stained teeth. But is switching to white wine keeping your whites any pearlier? Not necessarily, according to a recent study by New York University College of Dentistry researchers. The study used two sets of cow's teeth, whose surface closely resembles human teeth, soaking each for one hour in either water or white wine and then immersing them in black tea. Researchers found that the teeth soaked in white wine for one hour, which the researchers say is similar to the effect of sipping white wine with dinner, had significantly darker stains than the teeth soaked in water before exposure to the tea. The acids in wine create rough spots and grooves, which allow the chemicals in other beverages, such as coffee or tea, to penetrate deeper into the surface of the tooth.



Red, white, or whitening?