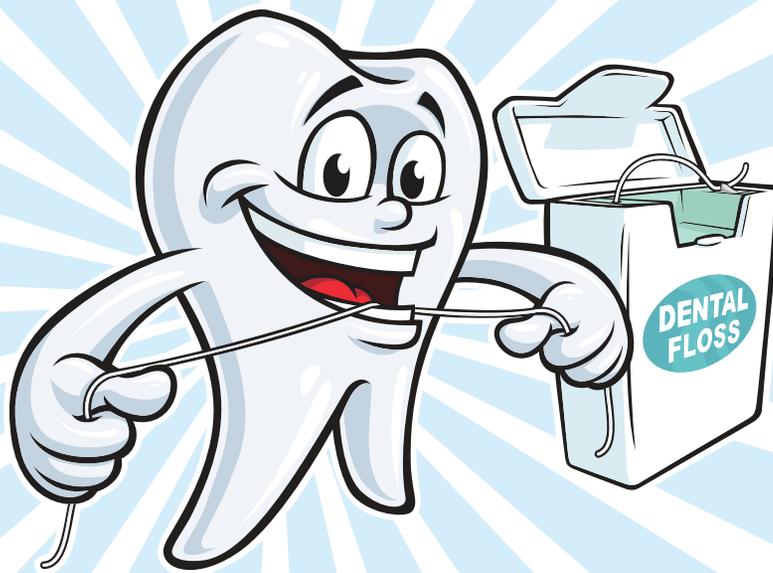


# Word<sub>OF MOUTH</sub>

A SEMIANNUAL PUBLICATION OF THE MASSACHUSETTS DENTAL SOCIETY

Winter - Spring 2018

## FLOSSSophy<sup>®</sup> 101



**Teaching You the Importance of  
Flossing Your Teeth Every Day**

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:

Melissa Carman  
Director of Publications  
Massachusetts Dental Society  
Two Willow Street  
Southborough, MA 01745-1027  
Email: [mcarman@massdental.org](mailto:mcarman@massdental.org)

Copyright © 2018 Massachusetts Dental Society

Robert E. Boose, EdD, *Executive Director*

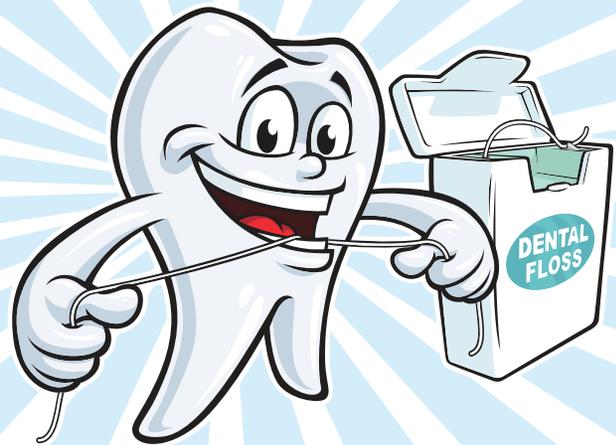
Melissa Carman, *Director of Publications*

Jeanne M. Burdette, *Senior Graphic Design Specialist*

Michelle Weaver, *Graphic Designer*

Todd Belfecker, DMD, *Consultant*

# 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.

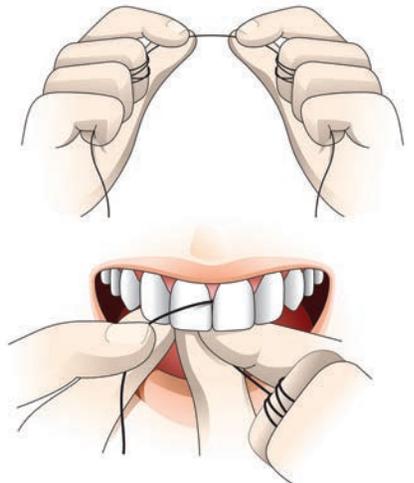
Not sure how to start? Learn the ABCs of the Dental FLOSSophy:

- 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.**



# DEALING WITH DENTAL CHAIR FEAR

If you're one of the 30 to 40 million Americans who suffers from dental anxiety, then President Franklin D. Roosevelt's famous quote "The only thing we have to fear is . . . fear itself" might not pop into your head when you're fretting about an upcoming dental visit. People with extreme dental fear avoid the dentist and only seek dental care when they are suffering from extreme pain. But delaying a trip to or avoiding the dentist altogether is dangerous business, as these routine dental checkups can help detect small oral health problems that if left untreated can turn into bigger—and costlier—health issues down the road.

For some, fear of the dentist may stem from an unpleasant dental experience they had when they were younger. For others, it's caused by a fear of pain or needles. So how can you overcome your dental chair fear? The American Dental Association (ADA) offers some tips to help you face down your dental fears.

## SPEAK UP

It can be, well, scary to admit fear, but it's in your best interest to do just that when you arrive for a dental appointment. Your dentist and dental team only want to provide you with the best treatment and experience possible, but at the end of the day, you are your own best advocate.

- Let your dentist and dental staff know about your anxiety when you arrive for your appointment. Tell them that you are anxious, and what specifically makes you anxious (e.g., pain, needles, drills, tooth extractions, etc.). Share any bad experiences you had in the past, and ask for suggestions on coping strategies. Many times, simply discussing your fears can help your dental team ensure that you feel comfortable and may allow them to adapt the treatment to accommodate your anxiety.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions. Knowledge is power, and sometimes, just knowing what is going to happen can help alleviate your fear of the unknown.
- Establish a signal—such as raising your hand—to let your dentist know that you need to take a break during a procedure. Use this signal whenever you are uncomfortable, need to rinse your mouth, or simply want to catch your breath.
- Tell your dentist immediately if you experience pain, even with a local anesthetic. It's easy to feel embarrassed about your pain tolerance or want to avoid interrupting your dentist mid-procedure, but you should talk with your dentist about pain before it starts so he or she knows how to make you more comfortable.

## DISTRACT YOURSELF

If you're feeling anxious during a procedure, redirecting your thoughts can help relax your mind and calm your fears. There are a few simple things you can do to help distract your thoughts.

- Tune out. If the sound of the drill bothers you, bring headphones and listen to your favorite music or audio book. Some dental offices even have televisions and/or play DVDs right in the treatment room, so try to pay more attention to what's happening on the screen and less to what your dentist is doing.
- Play ball. Occupy your hands by squeezing a stress ball or even playing with a small handheld object, such as a fidget spinner.
- Close your eyes and imagine your "happy place" (e.g., a relaxing beach or breath-taking mountain peak) and visualize yourself there. Mentally start planning your next vacation or fun trip.

## BE MINDFUL

Relaxation starts in the mind, and the use of mindfulness techniques—like those used in yoga and meditation—can help soothe your worried head. These deep-breathing exercises can help relax any tension in your muscles.

- Count your breaths. Inhale slowly and then exhale for the same number of counts. Do this five times while you're waiting for your appointment or during breaks while you're sitting in the dental chair.
- Do a body scan. Concentrate on relaxing your muscles, one body part at a time. Start with your head and work your way down to your toes. For example, you can focus on releasing tension starting in your forehead, then your cheeks, then your neck, and so on down the rest of your body. You may not even get to your toes before your dentist finishes!

Another tip is to schedule your appointment for a time when you won't feel any added stress. This might be a time when you are less rushed—say, first thing in the morning or on a Saturday or evening. By not hurrying to your appointment, you may feel more relaxed and at ease, which in turn will help you be better able to face your dental fear.

Your teeth and gums hold important clues to other health issues in the body. Research shows a link between poor oral health and heart disease, stroke, diabetes, premature births, and osteoporosis. A routine dental exam allows your dentist not only to help you maintain healthy teeth and gums, but also to be on the lookout for developments that may lead to future health problems that may otherwise go undetected (such as oral cancer) if not for a dental exam—and that's truly something to fear! Don't let your fear of the chair keep you from visiting the dentist regularly and being the healthiest you can be.



# Diabetes and Oral Health

Here's some not-so-sweet news: More than 30 million Americans (9.4% of the population) are reported to have diabetes, according to the American Diabetes Association and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. As many as 1.5 million new cases are diagnosed every year, and what's more, 23.8% of people with diabetes do not even know that they have it. Diabetes is a chronic disease characterized by high blood glucose (sugar) levels resulting from defects in the body's ability to produce and/or use insulin. It can lead to serious health problems, including heart disease, blindness, kidney failure, leg or foot amputations, and, in extreme cases, death. And when not controlled, diabetes can also lead to a number of dental complications because the high glucose levels in saliva may help bacteria thrive in the mouth. If you have diabetes, it's important to maintain good oral hygiene and visit your dentist regularly to prevent periodontal disease and other health complications from developing.

## BLOOD SUGAR CONTROL IS KEY

The most common and potentially harmful oral health problems for diabetics are gingivitis and periodontitis. Periodontitis is a more severe form of gum disease that occurs when the gums and bone supporting the teeth become seriously damaged, potentially resulting in tooth loss. Since diabetes reduces the body's resistance to infection, the body's tissues—including the gums—are likely to be affected. Periodontitis is often linked to how well people with diabetes control their disease; patients with inadequate control of their blood sugar appear to develop periodontitis more often and more severely—and lose more teeth—than those who control their diabetes. In fact, one in five cases of patients losing all teeth in the mouth is linked to diabetes, according to the American Dental Association.

As a result of high blood sugar levels and diabetes medications, the amount of saliva in the mouth is also affected, leading to dry mouth (xerostomia) and resulting in an increased risk for cavities. The extra sugar in

saliva, combined with less saliva to wash away food particles, can result in cavities. Dry mouth can be treated by increasing water intake, chewing sugarless gum, and eating healthy, crunchy foods (e.g., cruciferous vegetables like celery) that increase saliva flow.

Since diabetic patients are at an increased risk of infection, they may experience more frequent oral infections. These can include recurrent canker sores and oral thrush (candidiasis), which appears as a cottage cheese-like coating on the tongue and insides of the cheeks and is often accompanied by a foul taste. Thrush is a yeast infection resulting from the higher amount of sugar found in the saliva, and it is more common in people who wear dentures. Maintaining good oral hygiene by brushing and flossing regularly, and cleaning dentures daily if they are worn, can help keep the mouth bacteria-free and less susceptible to infections.

While diabetes is a chronic disease for which there is yet no cure, patients who properly manage their condition and avoid complications from the disease—including oral health issues—can live healthier lives. Controlling blood sugar, maintaining optimum oral health by brushing and flossing regularly, and visiting the dentist regularly can go a long way to help decrease the likelihood of developing diabetes-related oral health issues. People with diabetes may require more frequent visits to the dentist and more rigorous follow-up treatments (i.e., for treatment of gum disease) to ensure optimum oral health.



## Five Tips to Ensure Oral Health for Diabetics

If you have diabetes, follow these tips to help maintain your oral health:

- Control your blood sugar levels. Use diabetes-related medications as directed, adopt a healthy diet, and exercise regularly. Good blood sugar control will also help your body fight any bacterial or fungal infections in your mouth and help relieve dry mouth caused by diabetes.
- Don't smoke.
- Denture wearers should be sure to clean their denture(s) each day.
- Brush your teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste and a soft-bristle brush, and floss once a day.
- See your dentist for regular checkups.

Source: American Dental Association





Have you ever taken a sip of an ice-cold drink on a hot summer day or a spoonful of steaming soup on a cold winter afternoon only to be met with a sharp jab in your tooth? When you floss or brush your teeth, do you wince in pain? You may shrug it off as a minor annoyance, but the truth is that there's nothing minor about sensitive teeth, because ignoring the condition could lead to major mouth problems down the road. When it comes to your oral health, you can't be overly "sensitive."

Dentin can also be exposed when gums recede, leading to sensitivity near the gum line. The best way to prevent gums from receding and causing hypersensitivity is maintaining good oral hygiene. Flossing regularly and brushing correctly can help keep your gums healthy and prevent them from receding. And when it comes to brushing, be sure to use a soft-bristle brush and a gentle hand, as medium-bristle brushes and brushing too vigorously can injure gums and expose tooth roots.

## SENSITIVE TEETH: Wince Not, Want Not

While it's easy to shrug off tooth sensitivity as just the result of eating something too hot or too cold, sensitive teeth may actually be the symptom of an underlying problem: cavities, a cracked tooth, worn tooth enamel, worn fillings, or exposed tooth roots. If a cavity, filling, or cracked tooth is the culprit, your dentist can offer a fix by filling the cavity, replacing the filling, or fixing the fractured tooth. However, if he or she determines that cavities and fractured teeth are not behind this hypersensitivity, then the cause could be either worn tooth enamel or an exposed tooth root.

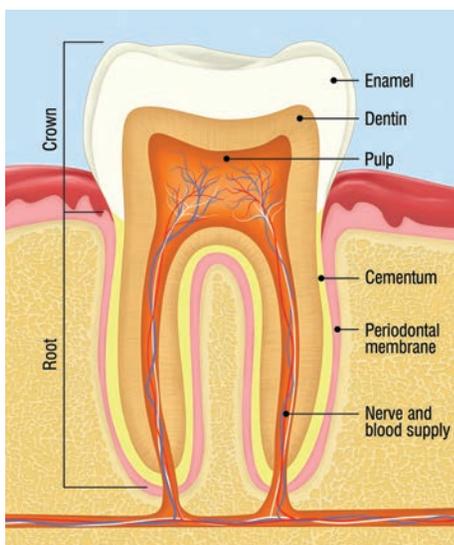
Healthy teeth are made of enamel, cementum, dentin, and pulp. Enamel, the outermost layer of the tooth, is the strongest substance in the body and it is what you see when you smile. Cementum is what covers the root. Dentin can be found under the enamel and the cementum, and it, in turn, surrounds the pulp. The pulp contains the nerves and vasculature of the tooth.

When the dentin loses its protective covering, hot and cold foods and beverages—as well as acidic or sticky foods—stimulate the nerves and cells inside the tooth, leading to hypersensitivity and discomfort.

If you're experiencing tooth sensitivity, you may want to try a desensitizing toothpaste to alleviate your discomfort. These special toothpastes—many of which can be purchased over-the-counter at your local drugstore or supermarket—contain compounds that help block transmission of sensation from the tooth surface to the nerve. Be aware that it may take several applications before tooth sensitivity is reduced. And if desensitizing toothpaste does not give you

some relief, your dentist may be able to provide in-office techniques, such as applying a fluoride gel that strengthens the tooth enamel and reduces the transmission of sensation.

Regardless of the severity of your sensitivity and discomfort, and even if desensitizing toothpastes temporarily alleviate the pain, you'll want to be sure to visit your dentist, who can determine the cause of the sensitivity. Not only will this help you head off any conditions (e.g., exposed roots that, if left untreated, could eventually require serious treatment, such as a root canal), but also it will allow you to enjoy that cold drink or hot soup without wincing.



# Tooth Fairy Maze



Help the tooth fairies find the tooth.

# YES, Babies CAN Develop Tooth Decay.

That's why the Massachusetts Dental Society, along with the American Dental Association, the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, and the Massachusetts Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, recommends that children have their first dental visit within six months of the eruption of their first tooth or by age one, whichever comes first.

## Have ONE.

First Dental Checkup



## By Age ONE.

First Birthday



This first visit allows the dentist to check not only for tooth decay, but also for other things that can adversely affect teeth and gums. Additionally, parents will be shown how to properly clean their infant's mouth.

**It's never too early for a first dental visit to put your child on the road to good oral health that can last a lifetime.**

**ADS**  
MASSACHUSETTS  
DENTAL SOCIETY

## So just think about ONE.

[massdental.org](http://massdental.org)