

# Floss your teeth -- on the double!

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In dental offices all over the world, patients are often told they are not flossing enough or instructed to floss more. As the old saying goes, you only need to floss the teeth you want to keep. After all, not flossing regularly can lead to tooth decay and to periodontal disease, the leading cause of tooth loss in adults.

A recent study published in the *Journal of Periodontology* (JOP), the official publication of the American Academy of Periodontology (AAP) demonstrates that including flossing as part of one's routine oral care can actually help reduce the amount of gum disease-causing bacteria found in the mouth, therefore contributing to healthy teeth and gums.

The study, conducted at New York University, examined 51 sets of twins between the ages of 12 and 21. Each set was randomly assigned a 2-week treatment regimen with one twin brushing with a manual toothbrush and toothpaste and the other twin brushing with a manual toothbrush and toothpaste and flossing. At the end of the two week trial, samples were taken from both pairs of twins and compared for levels of bacteria commonly associated with periodontal disease.

The study findings indicated that those twins who did not floss had significantly more of the bacteria associated with periodontal disease when compared to the matching twin who flossed in addition to tooth-brushing with toothpaste.

"This study illustrates the impact flossing can have on oral health. The twins experimental model is a powerful tool to help sort out genetic and

environmental factors that often confound the interpretation of treatment studies. This study demonstrates that flossing can have an important and favorable impact on an individual, as compared to that of a non-flossing individual with similar genetics and possibly similar habits," explains Dr. Kenneth Kornman, editor of the Journal of Periodontology. "Twins tend to share the same or similar environmental factors such as dietary habits, health and life practices, as well as genetics. In this case, the only difference was flossing, and the outcome was significant. Flossing may significantly reduce the amount of bad bacteria in the mouth."

The study results support that old saying, and show that including flossing as an integral part of your regular oral care can help reduce the amount of periodontal disease-causing bacteria in the mouth; therefore helping you keep your teeth. Periodontal disease is an infection caused by a build-up of bacterial plaque, a sticky, colorless film that constantly forms on your teeth. Flossing, or using interdental cleaners, helps clean the bacterial plaque from between your teeth that regular brushing can't reach.

"As a practicing periodontist, I am constantly telling my patients to clean between their teeth more using dental floss or interdental cleaners," says Dr. Susan Karabin, President of the AAP. "Patients tend to think that flossing can't possibly make that much of a difference. But this study demonstrates that the addition of flossing to your dental hygiene routine can significantly reduce the amount of periodontal disease causing bacteria. Even after just two weeks!"

Source: American Academy of Periodontology

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