

DENTAL NATION PROTOCOL

The Flossing & Interdental Protocol

Your toothbrush misses the surfaces between every tooth. Here is how to clean the part it never reaches, and what the evidence actually says.

40%

TOOTH SURFACE
A BRUSH MISSES

1×

BETWEEN-TEETH
CLEAN PER DAY

500+

BACTERIAL
SPECIES IN
PLAQUE



WHY IT MATTERS

Brushing stops at the contact point

Toothbrush bristles cannot enter the tight zone where two teeth touch, so the surfaces between your teeth are routinely under-cleaned. Brushing removes only about 40 to 60 percent of plaque per session, and least of all between teeth.

These sheltered gaps are exactly where biofilm builds fastest and gum inflammation tends to start. Cleaning between teeth targets that high-risk, brush-inaccessible site.

THE POINT

Interdental cleaning is not a bonus step. It reaches the surfaces brushing structurally cannot, where decay and gum disease most often begin.

Source: ADA · NHS · Ng & Lim, Dentistry Journal (2019)



THE ROUTINE

Clean between every tooth, once a day

- 1 Floss before you brush.** A small trial found floss-then-brush removed more interdental plaque and left more fluoride between teeth. The NHS agrees; do it once daily.
- 2 Use a long piece, fresh section each gap.** Take 30 to 45 cm, keep 3 to 4 cm taut, and advance to a clean segment for every space so you are not shuttling plaque around.
- 3 Curve into a C-shape.** Hug the side of one tooth, slide gently just under the gumline to light resistance, and rub up and down. Repeat on the neighboring tooth. Two surfaces per gap.
- 4 Be gentle, never snap.** Ease past the contact point with a soft rocking motion. Snapping floss into the gum traumatizes the tissue.
- 5 For visible gaps, size up to a brush.** Interdental brushes fitted snugly clean open spaces as well or better than floss. Reserve floss for tight contacts.



THE ONE RULE

Match the tool to the gap, then use it daily

The evidence is humbling: every benefit in the landmark 2019 Cochrane review is graded low to very-low certainty. What that means in practice is that consistency and fit matter more than the brand or the device.

Interdental brushes win where gaps allow them. Floss handles tight contacts. A water flosser helps with braces, implants or limited dexterity. Pick what fits your mouth and what you will actually do every day.

Source: Cochrane Review CD012018, Worthington et al. (2019) • ADA



What the evidence does and doesn't say

-  **A water flosser fully replaces floss.** Mostly refuted. It flushes debris but does not scrape biofilm like floss. Genuinely useful for braces, implants and poor dexterity, but a targeted alternative, not a blanket swap.
-  **The 2016 headlines proved flossing doesn't work.** A misread. The trials are weak and few, which is an absence of strong proof, not proof of no benefit. The ADA and NHS still advise cleaning between teeth daily.
-  **Bleeding means stop flossing.** Backwards. Early bleeding usually signals existing gum inflammation. Keep going gently; it typically settles within a couple of weeks. Persistent bleeding warrants a dentist.
-  **Premium or special floss cleans better.** Not so. The ADA finds no effectiveness difference between waxed and unwaxed floss. Choose by comfort and how tight your contacts are.



MAKE IT YOURS

Adjust for your mouth

Tender or bleeding gums

Keep cleaning gently and daily. Bleeding usually fades in one to two weeks as gums heal. See a dentist if it persists past two weeks.

Implants, crowns & bridges

Use a coated-wire interdental brush or thread floss under bridge pontics. Around crowns, pull floss out sideways, not up, to protect the margin.

Braces

Plain floss cannot pass the wire. Use a floss threader or Super Floss, or a water flosser with an orthodontic tip, which has the strongest braces evidence.

Treated gum disease

Interdental brushes come first here, not floss. Get sized by a hygienist; you will likely need two or three sizes around the mouth.



WHEN TO GET CHECKED

Signs to bring to a professional

- ✓ Bleeding that continues beyond two weeks of gentle daily cleaning
- ✓ Receding gums, loose teeth, or persistent bad breath
- ✓ You are unsure of your interdental brush size, get fitted in person
- ✓ New or unexplained bleeding if you already clean between teeth well
- ✓ Pain when flossing, or gaps where you are unsure which tool fits

WORTH BOOKING

A hygienist can watch your technique and size your interdental brushes. Correct fit and gentle daily use matter more than any product you buy.



YOUR NEXT STEP

Clean the 40% your brush can't reach

BOOK A CHECK-UP

DENTALNATION.COM

Next week — The Sensitivity & Enamel Protocol

