

Oral Health

By Rachel Maier, MS



DO YOU FLOSS? Be honest! I admit I don't floss nearly as often as I know I should. I feel an awful lot of guilt about it and get anxious every time I'm due for a dental visit. I know my hygienist will ask about my flossing habits, but she will know the answer before I respond. While my lips may try to hide the truth, my mouth doesn't lie.

I really am trying to do better. In fact, I dutifully flossed last night! While I wiggled the floss between my teeth, I realized the only reason I don't do it regularly is I just don't want to, and after a long, busy day, skipping this essential part of oral hygiene seems insignificant. Plus, to tell the *whole* truth, flossing is awkward, uncomfortable and a little bit gross. But while we hear over and over and *over* again that brushing alone isn't enough, we don't hear much about why it's not enough.

Risk of Infection

Brushing and flossing do much more than rid your mouth of bad

breath, keep your teeth looking white or dislodge popcorn kernels from between your teeth. They keep your mouth clean, which in turn keeps your body clean. The mouth is full of germs, and as the entrance point to the digestive track and respiratory system, germs in the mouth can travel to other systems of the body — and cause major problems!

Bacteria like to congregate on the tongue, teeth and areas between the teeth and the gums, which is why brushing alone isn't enough. Brushing removes surface level bacteria, while flossing removes bacteria that is likely to accumulate in tight, hard-to-reach places. The bacteria, acids and carbohydrates together form plaque, which (if not removed) hardens into tartar. This can lead to tooth decay (which leads to infection) and gum disease (which *is* an infection), and those infections can spread.¹

A Surprising Link

Oral health can contribute to medical conditions such as cardiovascular disease, pneumonia and even complications during pregnancy. Who knew that regular brushing and flossing can help keep other bodily systems functioning properly?


Coronary artery disease, clogged arteries, stroke and endocarditis are all associated with poor oral health. Studies show that people with periodontal disease have higher rates of atherosclerosis, which is plaque buildup inside of the blood vessels that deliver oxygen from the heart to the body. Atherosclerosis is also linked to strokes. Further, people

who have heart disease or other heart-related issues are at a higher risk of developing endocarditis (inflammation of the lining of the heart valves), which is caused by a bacterial infection contracted during procedures such as tooth extractions.

Lungs can be negatively affected by bacteria, too. Bacteria from the mouth can travel through the upper airway into the lungs, possibly causing pneumonia or other lung infections.

In pregnant women, poor oral health is associated with restricted fetal growth, gestational diabetes, low birth rate, miscarriage, stillbirth and preeclampsia. It is thought that bacteria from the mouth can travel through the mother's bloodstream to the fetus, causing harm to the baby.

Oral Health Affects Overall Health

A healthy mouth supports a healthy body, so take good care of yours! Brush for two minutes twice a day; floss and use an antibacterial mouthwash once a day; and see your dentist twice per year. Chew sugar-free gum between meals. You don't need fancy equipment to get the job done, but if you're in the market for new spins on tried-and-true oral health products, check out the shopping guide. 

Reference

1. How Your Oral Health Affects Your Overall Health. Cleveland Clinic, Oct. 20, 2022. Accessed at health.clevelandclinic.org/oral-health-body-connection.



RACHEL MAIER, MS, is the associate editor of *IG Living* magazine.



Huppy Toothpaste Tablets

Huppy Toothpaste Tablets are the clean and green way to brighten and whiten your smile. Made with healthy, non-toxic ingredients such as nano-hydroxyapatite (N-HA) to keep teeth safe from decay;

xylitol to ward off bacteria; and coconut oil to keep gums happy and healthy, these convenient pellets are perfect for every day use or for travel. If you're in the market to ditch non-recyclable toothpaste tubes, these award-winning toothpaste tablets are packaged using 100 percent plastic free materials.

\$13; behuppy.com

Spry Natural Gum

Can't brush after you eat? Try chewing Spry sugar-free gum between meals. Formulated with xylitol, a natural sweetener with clinically proven, unique dental health benefits, this gum defends against bacteria that cause cavities and tooth decay while freshening your breath in a convenient way. Choose from peppermint, spearmint, cinnamon, fruit and bubblegum flavors.

Starts at \$9.99; sprysmile.xlear.com/product/natural-xylitol-gum



Shopping Guide for Oral Health



TheraBreath Healthy Gums Oral Rinse with CPC

Fortified with the ingredient CPC, an ingredient clinically shown to help fight gingivitis, this oral rinse helps control the plaque that leads to gingivitis and bleeding gums. This dentist-formulated periodontal mouthwash quickly attacks the bacteria, helping to fight gingivitis, an early form of gum disease, and bleeding gums for 24 hours when used twice daily, and it helps freshen breath with an alcohol-free formula that doesn't burn.

\$8.89; www.therabreath.com/products/healthy-gums-oral-rinse

Sonic Brush

Sonic Brush is the world's first fully automatic toothbrush. This patented device has a unique design that brushes all of your teeth at the same time, is completely automatic and does the trick in just 30 seconds. With thousands of vibrations that gently clean your teeth, the Sonic Brush de-germs and cleans your mouth in just 30 seconds. It gently wraps each tooth for deeper cleaning and healthier gums, removing up to 100 percent more plaque than a manual toothbrush. All you have to do is press a single button, wait 30 seconds and smile with confidence through the rest of the day. *\$59.99; sonic-brush.net*



Dr. Tung's Tongue Cleaner

Dr. Tung's brought the ancient practice of tongue scraping to the United States more than 30 years ago, and mouths have been cleaner ever since. Tongue cleaning is recommended by dentists and hygienists, and it's no wonder: Research shows that a scraper is five times more effective than using a toothbrush to clean your tongue and remove bacteria that causes bad breath.

\$8.95; drtungs.com/tongue-cleaners

Flaus Electronic Flosser

Dreamed up by a woman who hated traditional flossing, Flaus is a tool designed to make flossing your teeth quicker, cleaner and more comfortable. Designed by a team of dentists and engineers, Flaus uses up to 18,000 sonic vibrations per minute to efficiently remove plaque and debris from between teeth. The whole job is done in 90 seconds! *\$99; goflaus.com/products/flaus-starter-kit*

