- Dental care

The unsung hero

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When it comes to maintaining a healthy smile, brushing often takes center stage.
There's another essential tool that plays a crucial role in oral hygiene: dental floss.
While it might seem like a small addition to your daily routine, flossing can make a big difference in preventing gum disease, cavities and even bad breath.
Dental floss is more than just a thin string — it's a vital weapon against the plaque and bacteria that a toothbrush can't reach.
Dental floss is a thin, flexible strand designed to remove food particles and plaque from between teeth and along the gumline — areas that a toothbrush's bristles can't effectively clean.
It is usually made of nylon or Teflon fibers and can come waxed or unwaxed, flavored or unflavored.
The wax coating helps the floss slide more easily between tight spaces, while flavoring — commonly mint — adds a refreshing touch to the cleaning process.
Even the most thorough brushing only cleans about 60 percent of your tooth surfaces. The remaining 40 percent — the spaces between your teeth and below the gumline — can harbor plaque, bacteria and food debris.
If not removed, this buildup can harden into tartar (calculus), which can only be removed by a dental professional.
Plaque accumulation leads to gingivitis, the first stage of gum disease, characterized by redness, swelling, and bleeding of the gums.
If left untreated, gingivitis can progress to periodontitis, a serious infection that damages the bone supporting the teeth and can eventually cause tooth loss.
Regular flossing disrupts bacterial colonies, preventing plaque from hardening and reducing inflammation in the gums.
Today's dental care industry offers several types of floss to suit different needs:

* Nylon (multifilament) floss — The most common type, available in waxed and unwaxed varieties. It's effective but may shred or break in tight spaces.
* PTFE (monofilament) floss — Made of a single strand of Teflon-like material, this type glides smoothly between teeth and resists fraying.
* Dental tape — Broader and flatter than traditional floss, ideal for people with larger gaps between teeth.
* Floss picks and interdental brushes — Convenient alternatives for those who find traditional flossing difficult, especially children, seniors, or individuals with limited dexterity.

To get the most out of flossing, technique matters.

Dentists recommend using about 18 inches of floss, winding most of it around each middle finger, leaving a few inches to work with.
Gently guide the floss between teeth using a backand-forth motion — never snap it into the gums.
Curve the floss into a “C” shape around each tooth and slide it up and down beneath the gumline to remove plaque.
Use a clean section of floss for each tooth to avoid transferring bacteria.
Flossing doesn’t just protect your gums — it can also improve your overall health.
Studies suggest that gum disease is linked to systemic conditions such as heart disease, diabetes and respiratory infections.
By keeping the mouth free from harmful bacteria, flossing contributes to a healthier body as well as a brighter smile.
Dental floss may be small, but its impact on oral health is immense.
When combined with regular brushing, fluoride toothpaste, and routine dental visits, flossing forms the foundation of effective oral hygiene.
Making flossing a daily habit takes only a few minutes, yet it prevents problems that could lead to costly and painful dental treatments later on.
In short, flossing is not optional — it’s essential.
A simple strand of dental floss can be the difference between a healthy mouth and a lifetime of dental issues.
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