

# Toothy facts

What do most people do twice a day, but haven't a clue what they're doing? Clean their teeth!

Statistics support this surprising statement. Two-thirds of regular attendees at UK dental practices fail to clean their teeth properly, leaving large amounts of plaque behind. That gum disease is the chief cause of tooth loss in adults and gum disease is considered the 6th complication of diabetes.

## You can't remove what you can't see.

Bacteria on our teeth are perfectly camouflaged; they're tooth-coloured. I know that if the plaque were bright purple, we'd all have perfect oral hygiene. Disclosing tablets (great for kids) and disclosing solution make plaque visible.

Plaque collects at the junction where the tooth and gum meets. This is why the bristles of the toothbrush should be angled at 45°. They should go under the gum into the crevice that surrounds the tooth. Think of a nail brush going under the nail; that's how the toothbrush should go under the gum. The toothbrush should be very soft and moved in a circular motion

## To floss or not to floss, that is the question.

Flossing has to be one of the most difficult skills on earth to master which explains why most people don't do it.

I recommend the use of a dental tape and not a dental floss. It is a broad ribbon which allows plaque to be easily scraped off the side of the tooth. Dental floss is just too thin for this purpose.

Alternatively, a **flossing handle** can be used and **don't forget** to clean the tongue!

Tongue cleaning should be part of routine oral hygiene. The tongue's bacterial film is the main source of bad breath. Saliva is not only 'nature's cavity-fighter' but also 'nature's mouthwash' which partially explains why bad breath is common on waking (low salivary flow overnight).

## Should I use a mouthwash?

Mouthwashes can inhibit the development of dental plaque. However, they are only an adjunct to brushing and flossing and not a replacement. You can

use your mouthwash once or twice a day.

## Chew on this!

Xylitol is a neutraceutical, a food substance with medical benefits. This is true in the mouth where mouth bacteria can break down sugars but can't do the same for Xylitol and the bacteria literally starve. To be dentally effective, it must be given in small doses (10g/day), frequently (3-5 times a day), and long-term. The best way is to chew Xylitol gum after meals and snacks. Look out for chewing gums containing this wonderful ally.

## Visit your dentist

People, especially those with diabetes, should visit their dentist/oral hygienist regularly. They must find one who is particularly interested in this condition and how it impacts on oral health.

There are a whole range of chair-side tests which allow the dental professional to monitor oral health. These include salivary tests. Low salivary flow (dry mouth) is particularly common in people with diabetes and needs to be assessed. □