

Cleaning teeth, Just by toothbrushing?

Why should we clean our teeth?

It is to remove the dental plaque. The plaque is a bacterial film adhered onto the tooth surfaces.



Dental plaque on tooth surfaces

What are the consequences of not having thoroughly removed the dental plaque?

The dental plaque will accumulate leading to the development of tooth decay and gum disease. In Hong Kong, about 40% 12 years old adolescents had been experienced tooth decay. More than 90% adults are suffering from various degree of periodontal disease. Thus, it is evident that dental diseases, which are caused by accumulation of dental plaque, are very common. In order to prevent the dental diseases, it is necessary to thoroughly remove dental plaque.

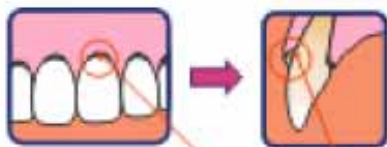
So, would toothbrushing be adequate to remove the dental plaque?

Not necessarily. Please note that the dental plaque tends to accumulate in some hard-to-clean areas such as:

- I. *The crevice at the gum margin*
- II. *Adjacent tooth surfaces*
- III. *Under surfaces of dental bridges*
- IV. *Fixed orthodontic appliances*
- V. *Dentures and removable orthodontic appliances*

How to remove the dental plaque in the hard-to-clean areas?

Plaque accumulation area I: crevice at the gum margin



Plaque accumulation area: at the crevice

This area is often neglected during toothbrushing. Therefore it is prone to plaque accumulation. The following is a proposed toothbrushing technique that is aimed at cleaning this area as well as every tooth surface systematically.

1. Place the toothbrush with its bristles inserted into the crevice at the gum margin. Gently brush 2-3 teeth at a time in a back-and-forth motion. Brush each group of teeth for at least 10 times to ensure that the plaque is adequately removed.



2. Systematically, brush the outer surfaces of upper and lower teeth.



3. Then brush the inner surfaces of the upper and lower teeth.



4. Brush the chewing surfaces of the upper and lower teeth in a back-and-forth motion.

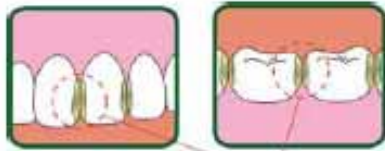


It is essential to use appropriate tools in applying the toothbrushing technique:

Toothbrush --- A toothbrush must be able to be manipulated freely in the mouth to reach every tooth surface. The bristles should be soft so that the gums will not be easily traumatized. If you choose an electric toothbrush, you should consult the dentist to see if you need to modify your toothbrushing technique for it.

Toothpaste --- Fluoride toothpaste should be used to strengthen the teeth and prevent tooth decay.

Plaque accumulation area II: Adjacent tooth surfaces



Plaque accumulation from the adjacent tooth surfaces

Daily use of dental floss is necessary to remove the plaque from the adjacent tooth surfaces. The following is one of the flossing techniques:

1. Take 20-25cm of floss and tie it into a loop.



2. Use the thumbs and forefingers to control a 2cm length of floss. Gently slide it between teeth using a sawing motion.



3. Hold the floss tightly against the adjacent tooth surface, forming a "C" shape. Gently move the floss up and down the surface. Then clean the other adjacent tooth surface with a clean part of the floss loop. Repeat the above procedures until all the adjacent tooth surfaces are cleaned.



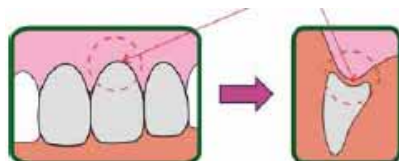
For those who have gum recession due to gum disease, the space between the roots of the teeth is much wider. In this situation an interdental brush can be used in place of the dental floss. Insert the interdental brush into the space between the roots to remove the plaque from the adjacent tooth surfaces.



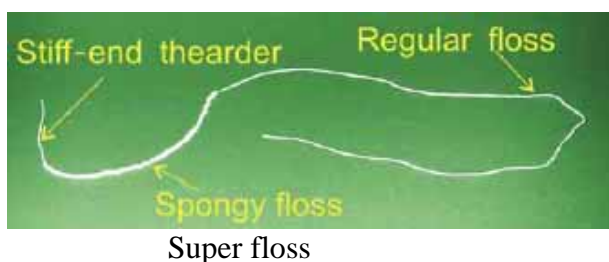
Insert the interdental brush into the space between the roots to remove the plaque from the adjacent tooth surfaces.

Plaque accumulation area III : Under surfaces of dental bridges

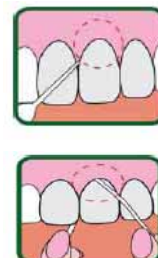
Plaque accumulation under surfaces of dental



It is essential for dental bridge wearers to floss the bridges using superfloss because the spongy portion can remove plaque from the under surfaces of the bridges.



1. Thread the stiff-end threader through the gap between the tooth and the bridge.
2. Hold the spongy floss against the gum and the under surface of the bridge respectively and clean them with a gentle back-and-forth and up-and-down motions.

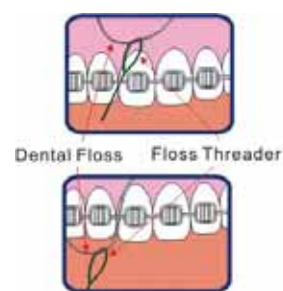


Plaque accumulation area IV: Fixed orthodontic appliances

Flossing seems difficult for people wearing fixed orthodontic appliances. In that case, a floss threader or superfloss can be used to guide the floss to facilitate the removal of plaque from the adjacent tooth surfaces.

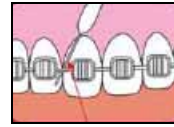
Using floss threader and floss

1. Thread floss through the space between the orthodontic wire and the teeth.
2. Follow steps 2 and 3 of the Flossing technique in the previous section and clean the adjacent tooth surfaces accordingly.



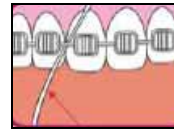
Using superfloss to clean the adjacent surface

1. Thread the stiff-end threader through the space between the orthodontic wire and the teeth.



The Stiff-end Thearther

2. Follow steps 2 and 3 of the Flossing technique in the previous section and clean the adjacent tooth surfaces accordingly.



Regular Floss

Plaque accumulation area V: Dentures and removable orthodontic appliance

Dental plaque also adheres onto the surfaces of dentures and removable orthodontic appliances. Wearers of these appliances should use the following steps to clean them:

1. Remove the appliance from the mouth. And then, brush the appliance with toothbrush and detergent thoroughly.



2. After clean the appliance, immerse it in a cup of water overnight.



3. Whenever the appliance is not in use, clean it and immerse it in water.



“Now that I know exactly where and how to remove plaque thoroughly. I'll do perfect job.”

Wait! Since you cannot look at your own mouth to check if your plaque-removal technique is effective, you need an expert to give you confirmation and advice. He is your dentist. Visit your dentist every year for oral check-up, he will:

1. Point out the areas where you omit in cleaning and advise you on the effective ways to do so. If your plaque-removal technique is adequate, he will give you assurance to continue in your ways.
2. Help you to improve your oral hygiene techniques and introduce appropriate cleaning tools to you so as to protect your teeth and tooth supporting tissues from the damage of plaque.
3. Identify and correct the factors causing plaque accumulation such as dental calculus and rough surfaces of dental fillings in order to reduce plaque accumulation.

After all, cleaning teeth is not simply by toothbrushing! Please remember to:

1. Brush your teeth as well as your dentures, bridges and orthodontic appliances etc in the morning and before bed at night.
2. Floss the adjacent tooth surfaces of teeth every evening.
3. Visit your dentist every year for oral check-up.