

Cleaning your 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 surface

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

The dental plaque will accumulate leading to the development of tooth decay and gum disease. According to 2021 Oral Health Survey of Hong Kong, about 20% 12 years old adolescents had been experienced tooth decay. Nearly 60% adults have gingival pockets of 4mm or above. 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 properly remove dental plaque.

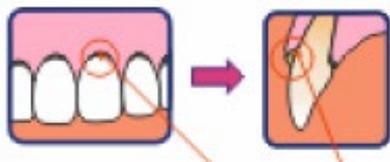
So, would toothbrushing be adequate to remove the dental plaque?

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

- I. Gingival sulcus
- II. Adjacent tooth surfaces
- III. Surfaces under fixed dental bridge
- 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: Gingival sulcus



Plaque accumulation area: at the gingival sulcus

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. Firstly, brush the outer surfaces of the lower teeth. The toothbrush head should be placed with the tips of the bristles tilted at an angle towards the gingival margin. Gently move the toothbrush in small scrubbing motions, working on two to three teeth at one time.
2. Then brush the inner surfaces of teeth in the same way as brushing the outer surfaces.
3. When we brush the inner surfaces of front teeth, we should hold the toothbrush upright using gentle motion brushing from the gingival margin towards the crowns of the teeth.
4. Then brush the chewing surfaces of the teeth with the toothbrush moving backward and forward. Finally, brush the outer surfaces, inner surfaces and the chewing surfaces of the upper teeth in the same way as the lower one.

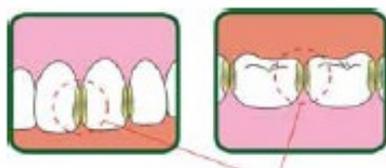


It is essential to use appropriate tools in applying the toothbrushing technique:

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 since fluoride is effective in prevention of tooth decay.

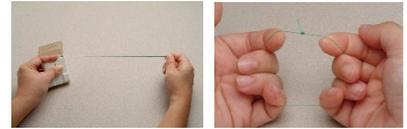
Plaque accumulation area II: Adjacent tooth surfaces



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. Wrap around one tooth making a "C" shape and gently pull down to the deepest part of the gingival sulcus, and then slide it up and down against the tooth. Then wrap around the adjacent tooth and repeat the up and down motions. Clean all the other adjacent tooth surfaces in the same way.

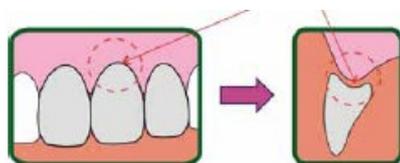


If the spaces between teeth are large like those teeth with gum recession due to gum disease, you may use interdental brush to clean the interdental space. Insert the interdental brush into the gap between the roots of the teeth, brush forward and backward to clean the adjacent tooth surfaces.



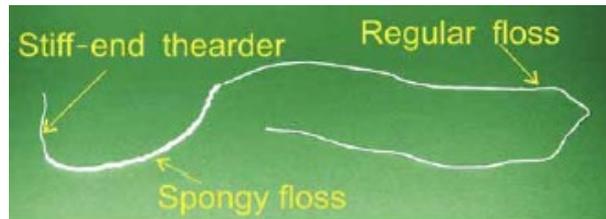
Insert the interdental brush into the gap between the teeth, placing the brush as close to the gingival margin as possible, move the brush back and forth to clean the adjacent tooth surfaces.

Plaque accumulation area III: Surfaces under fixed dental bridge



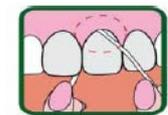
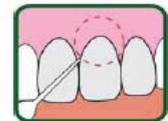
Plaque accumulation under surfaces of dental bridge

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



Superfloss

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 surface under the bridge, clean them with a gentle back-and-forth and up-and-down motions.

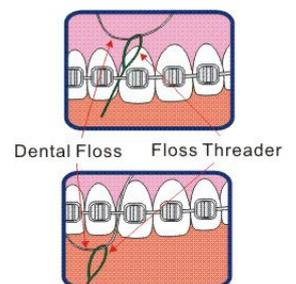


Plaque accumulation area IV: Fixed orthodontic appliances

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.

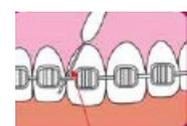
Using floss threader and floss

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.

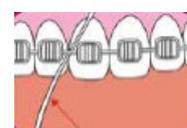


Using superfloss to clean the adjacent surface

1. Thread the stiff-end threader through the space between the orthodontic wire and the teeth.
2. Follow steps 2 and 3 of the flossing technique in the previous section and clean the adjacent tooth surfaces accordingly



The Stiff-end Threader



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 carefully.



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 effectively. 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 with fluoride toothpaste in the morning and before bed at night.
2. Clean the adjacent tooth surfaces with floss or interdental brush every day. If you have dental bridges or fixed orthodontic appliances, you should use tools such as superfloss for cleaning daily.
3. Visit your dentist every year for oral check-up.

(If you are wearing removable dentures or orthodontic appliances, please clean them with detergent every day.)