

# Flossing Tips for Caregivers

## Why floss?

Flossing is a very important part of good mouth care. Three sides of the teeth are constantly being cleaned by the tongue, cheeks, saliva, and toothbrush. However, natural cleansing does not occur between the teeth. Toothbrushes are too large to fit between teeth so food and bacteria collect for periods of time. This may cause the gums to become irritated, swollen, or lead to a foul smell. Continuous swelling may cause gum and bone loss creating larger spaces for food to collect.

## How do I floss?

Floss once per day before or after brushing.

1. Use about 18 inches of dental floss wrapped around one of your middle fingers, with the other end wrapped around the opposite middle finger.
2. Hold the dental floss tightly between the thumbs and pointer finger and gently insert it between the teeth.
3. Curve the dental floss against the side of the tooth in a 'C' shape
4. Wipe the floss up and down against the tooth
5. Repeat on the next tooth with a fresh section of the floss until the whole mouth is complete

## Trouble flossing? Try one of these for help:

Consider which method works best based on comfort and physical abilities.

## Floss Holders

- A handle that holds floss so you can floss the teeth with one hand
- They are especially helpful for caregivers with large fingers or if you are helping someone with a gag reflex.
- Wrap floss on the end of handle
- Insert floss between all teeth and slide up and down against each tooth
- Remove used floss and clean floss holder (hot water, mouth wash, etc.)
- You may also choose to use disposable floss holders which can be thrown away after using.

## Floss Threaders:

- Flexible plastic or nylon used to thread floss under fixed bridges
- Thread floss through loop in threader
- Insert threader between gum and bridge

## Proxi Brushes:

- Small pointed brush on a handle that cleans between teeth when space is available.
- Insert brush tip and brush between the teeth

## Stimudents/ toothpicks:

- Disposable plastic or wood device similar to toothpicks
- Insert in space between teeth

## If you are unable to floss:

There are existing products that are not floss but can help to clean between the teeth better than just a toothbrush.

- These devices use water or a mixture of air and water to clean between the teeth
- Insert tip and spray several seconds between each tooth

