

Reader's Digest

How Bad Is It to Not Floss Daily?

If you want strong, healthy teeth, you'd better listen up and pick up the floss

By Emily DiNuzzo | July 2, 2019



This food waste, plus saliva, combine to create bacteria that live in plaque and surrounds your teeth, according to **Bill Dorfman, DDS**, a celebrity cosmetic dentist. This bacteria in plaque is the culprit behind cavities, gingivitis, and even bone or tooth loss, along with other dental issues, Dr. Dorfman says. Floss is better than just a toothbrush for removing plaque because the string actually goes in between your teeth. And when you do use your brush on those pearly whites, remember that this is exactly how to brush your teeth.

So what's the worst that could happen?

How bad skipping floss is depends on how well you clean your mouth—but not flossing isn't worth gambling your oral health, says Dr. Dorfman. The most likely scenario for a person who doesn't floss every day is chronic gingivitis and more cavities than one who flosses daily, per Dr. Burhenne. And if you don't treat these cavities, it will lead to multiple root canal treatments or

extractions, Dr. Dorfman adds. You might also have bad breath and an imbalance in your oral microbiome.

And if all that doesn't convince you to pick up the string, know this: "The worst case scenario after decades of this process, or less, is the loss of teeth and large cavities, advanced gum disease with painful gum recession, and a much higher risk of conditions like chronic inflammation, Alzheimer's, and diabetes," says Dr. Burhenne. Risks like these are why skipping floss is one of the 30 everyday mistakes you're probably making that will ruin your teeth.

Is there another way to keep my teeth clean and healthy?

The answer is a hard "no" from Dr. Dorfman. "But if you can't floss, a WaterPik is the next best thing, but is not as good," he says. There are some studies, however, that suggest water flossing with a WaterPik is just as effective as regular flossing, Dr. Burhenne says. However, he still recommends keeping up a regular flossing habit and using water flossers as a supplement—not a replacement. Dr. Dorfman recommends flossing two to three times a day with waxed floss.

"Make sure to go all the way down, under the gums, forming a 'C' with the floss around the tooth," he says. If going beneath the gum line hurts, that means you aren't flossing enough, according to Dr. Burhenne. If your teeth bleed when you brush or floss, it might be thanks to one of these 6 reasons. Bottom line: Dr. Dorfman says to only floss the teeth you want to keep.

<https://www.rd.com/health/wellness/dental-floss-mixed-research/>