

Danielle Hughes


Mr. Bronkar





English 3 CIBACS

20 February, 2002

How to Properly Maintain a Clean and Healthy Mouth

 Young children have only twenty primary teeth, which are replaced by up to thirty-two permanent teeth. Two main enemies of dental health are tooth decay and gum diseases caused by a buildup of plaque. Routine cleaning of teeth and gums is necessary to prevent or remove plaque. To do this it is essential to brush, floss, and maintain regular dental check-ups.

Brushing the teeth is the first basic step for proper removal of plaque. “Plaque is a sticky, soft mass of bacteria that accumulates on the surface of the tooth, especially near the gumline” (Procter). Brushing also stimulates and strengthens the gums. The tool needed to effectively eliminate plaque is a good toothbrush. Whether the brush is electric or manual, it should have “three or four rows of soft nylon bristles, slightly dome shaped or with level tufts” (Himber 16).  Using a brush with hard bristles won’t clean the teeth any better, but may damage the surrounding gum. Once you have selected an effective toothbrush, you must next know how to use it properly.

You can start brushing anywhere in your mouth, as long as you develop a pattern that becomes a habit, so that all surfaces are brushed. There are three surfaces that the brush can reach: outside, inside, and chewing surfaces. Hold the toothbrush (“with or without toothpaste and wet or dry” Sydney 2) “at about a forty-five degree angle with the teeth” (Klatell 28). Apply  enough pressure so that the bristles penetrate the sulcus” (Klatell 29), which is “the gum that lies over the neck of the tooth” (Sydney 2). Then, “brush back and forth with several short,



gentle circular motions” (Himber 19) for the outside surfaces. After about five or six strokes, move to the next set of teeth. When brushing the inside of the teeth use up and down strokes. In some areas, it may be necessary to “use the tip of the brush with the same kind of strokes.” For the chewing surfaces, hold the brush flat, using a scrubbing motion. Remember that “harder brushing [doesn’t] clean [the teeth] better, but may damage the gumline,” (George 5) and the “enamel, which is a protective coat on the tooth which prevents wear and decay” (Klatell 29). A saying that will help you remember how to brush is the jab, jiggle, and roll. “You want to gently jab the bristles into the gumline, jiggle the brush, and roll the brush in the same direction as the teeth are growing.” The process of brushing your teeth should take about three minutes (George 5) and should be a daily practice. Regular, thorough brushing is essential to your dental health, (Klatell 3) but is not sufficient by itself. It needs the accompaniment of flossing to do a complete job.

Upon the completion of brushing your teeth, you have truly only brushed three sides of your teeth. However, teeth have five surfaces, so you must floss to reach the areas that your brush can’t reach. The most common mistake that people make is thinking that flossing is only necessary to dislodge any food that is caught between the teeth. Instead, “flossing should be done at least once a day before or after brushing” (Klatell 3). The area between the teeth has swollen, tender spots, the most cavities, and can even bleed easily (Himber 27). In fact, “if the space between the teeth is not cleaned, gum disease may occur. That is why flossing is so important” (Sydney 2).

Now that you know why flossing is important, you must now know how to do it correctly. First pick the type of floss you want. You can choose either waxed or unwaxed. “Unwaxed makes a sound when your teeth are cleaned, but it is very fragile” (Himber 16). The

next step is to “take about eighteen inches of wax and wind it around your middle fingers. It really doesn’t matter what section of the mouth you start, but just keep in mind that “the upper teeth are harder than the lower and the back are harder than the front” (Klatell 3). “To floss the upper left side of your mouth, pinch the floss with your left index finger and thumb and on the ball of your right index finger you must guide the floss between the teeth.” To clean your upper right side, you want to use the opposite fingers to hold and guide. To floss your lower teeth follow the same process for the left and right sides. While flossing, leave about five or six inches of wax in between your fingers. Continue checking the wax for any plaque or food particles, and if the wax picks any up, just release some of the wax from one of the fingers and pull tighter on the other. This gives you a new, clean area of floss to work with. It is important that you be especially mindful of holding the “floss with no slack, and only use gentle sawing motions.” If you pull or push too hard you can damage the gums. To make sure that you have removed all plaque between your teeth, slide the floss in a ‘C’ shape against the tooth and pull up away from the gum. If you hear a squeaky sound, then you know you did a good job, but if you don’t hear it, then repeat the process again by rubbing the floss against the teeth (Himber 17). Flossing helps clean your teeth and also stimulates the gums. Even though brushing and flossing are of major importance, you can still do more to maintain a clean, healthy mouth.

Another way you can keep your mouth clean, is to “visit the dentist twice a year” (Bright) to make sure you’re eliminating plaque and keeping your gums healthy. The dentist or the hygienist does numerous things to help clean the teeth. He might “insert fluoride into the periodontal pocket by using an oral irrigator.” Fluoride reduces decay and gingivitis, and also helps diminish bad breath (Sydney 2). The “more the teeth are exposed to fluoride, the more [they are] resistant to dental decay” (Himber 40), therefore allowing you to keep your teeth

longer. He also checks to see if there is any tartar on the teeth. “Tartar is calcified plaque that has become hard” (Procter). Instruments are now used to remove the tartar and tooth polish is applied to make the teeth smooth. With brushing, flossing, and visiting the dentist, you have done the three most important steps to achieving a clean mouth. Yet, there are still other things you can do.

Although toothpaste is not a necessity, it does help to polish the teeth and freshen the breath. After brushing your teeth, whether or not you have used toothpaste, you can take another step by buying a name brand mouthwash that will give your mouth instant freshness, but not cleanliness. For an effective mouthwash you can use “a small amount of salt or baking soda dissolved in warm water” (Klatell 3) and swish around the mouth and spit out. The abrasive motion helps to remove plaque. Although the tongue has not been mentioned, it too should be kept clean. A tongue scraper or the toothbrush can be used to do the job.

Even though taking care of your mouth takes only a few minutes of time each day, it is a process that is necessary for good dental health. Brushing, flossing, and visiting the doctor twice a year are very important to maintaining a clean mouth. Every day, we engage in conversations with a smile and breathy words. People are given only one set of permanent teeth in their lifetime, and they only need to take care of the ones they want to keep.

