

GAINING ADHERENCE TO FLOSSING - It just got easier!

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One of the biggest frustrations for dental hygienists is gaining cooperation from patients regarding their daily self-care regimens. Although the literature clearly shows a link between improved oral health and interproximal cleanliness, patients have been slow to embrace this daily ritual. Some of the frequent complaints cited by patients to their hygienists are:

- It is inconvenient
 - It takes too long
 - It hurts and makes my gums bleed
 - It gets stuck between my teeth
 - It simply isn't necessary— my gums are fine
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- It is inconvenient

Patients have difficulty beginning a daily self-care ritual that does not provide an immediate result. Provide tips for assisting patients in establishing a new habit. Patients can be instructed to place floss in several locations so it is a visual reminder. For example, in the bathroom next to the toothpaste and brush, purse, pocket, briefcase, office desk, car and backpack. When patients see the floss it helps trigger the notion that flossing needs to be done. Recommend that flossing be done when it is *most convenient to the patient*. When patients are told that they should floss before brushing and going to bed, it can limit them in their choices and provide a convenient excuse for not complying. Perhaps flossing would be more *convenient to the patient* if it were done on a lunch hour, during a coffee break at work, or while stuck in traffic, rather than during the traditional bedtime ritual. The key is to *involve the patient* in the discussion and get their ideas on the *best time for them*.

- It takes too long*

With our rapid paced society, everyone is in a hurry to accomplish the many tasks that are required at work and home. If a patient perceives flossing as too time consuming, it is likely to be postponed or not done at all. If patients do not use dental floss correctly, they can be inefficient thus taking more time. Assist patients by observing their technique and offering helpful hints to make them more skilled at flossing. The more practiced they are, the less time consuming the task becomes. Compare the less than two minute flossing task with an activity that takes more time – shaving, polishing shoes, applying make-up, reading the newspaper, etc. Reinforce the notion that for less than 15 minutes a week is a small investment toward the benefits to oral health.

- It hurts and makes my gums bleed*

A thorough assessment of the patient's technique will allow you to determine why it hurts. When patients use floss inappropriately, they snap it against their gums in frustration to force it between the teeth. By assisting them with improved technique, you can show them that flossing doesn't have to hurt. Choosing floss that is smoother to insert with less trauma is now an option. Explain to the patient that periodontal disease is a cyclical condition and that they can perform an evaluation of the status of their gingival health by checking for bleeding points and treating them by improved removal of bacterial plaque.

It gets stuck between my teeth

By evaluating the patient's technique you can determine why the floss is getting stuck. Allow patients to try different kinds of floss while at chair side and ask them to floss in an area where the floss gets stuck. Often they are pleasantly surprised with the new flosses available as they do not get stuck and frayed between the teeth like the older flosses.

It simply isn't necessary - my gums are fine

Involve patients in the assessment of their oral health status. Share with them the difference in areas that are healthy vs. unhealthy. Intra-oral cameras are an ideal tool to assist in the education of the patient. You can also share scores from a PSR, or other index that measures gingival health. Some patients might be more responsive by explaining the new links to heart disease and periodontal disease. If the patient is high risk for caries or periodontal disease due to overall health status this can be linked to the necessity of using floss.

It Just Got Easier - New Product Information

Oral-B conducted a patient study to explore what patients want in floss. Results of the inquiry revealed that patients want floss that is:

- easier to use
- easy to insert between teeth
- resistant to shredding
- has a pleasant mint taste

The result - a new product to address these consumer issues - SATINfloss™. It has two technological differences: a patented design and a patented flavor delivery system, positioning it as the gold standard. It is designed with two materials: nylon and Pebax, combined in one individual filament which makes it resistant to shredding and fraying. The floss slides easily between teeth and is gentle on gums and fingers without being too slippery - even when wet. A revolutionary and patented powder flavor system combines spearmint and peppermint to provide patients with a cool, long-lasting fresh taste.

SATINfloss™ delivers what patients have asked for and has proven clinical performance. SATINfloss™ was shown to reduce gingival bleeding by 58% after only two weeks of use. This compares favorably with conventional flosses with the added benefit of greater patient acceptance.^{1,2}

Unlike other dental tapes, Oral B has produced a unique dental tape as well. It is wider not thicker so it is just as easy to insert between the teeth as SATINfloss™. This wider cleaning surface is ideal for wider spaces between teeth and it contains the same patented flavor system as SANTINfloss™.

Hygienists embraced the new Teflon like floss when introduced, as they addressed many of the patients' concerns. In a double blind study SATINfloss™ was preferred over the leading Teflon like flosses among 71% of patients³, 65% of hygienists⁴ and 67% of dentists⁵. These are promising statistics and offer hygienists a more effective tool to aid in oral health promotion.

Conclusion:

One of the greatest assets we have is our positive influence with our patients who trust our judgement and seek our advice. Patients respond to hygienists that focus on their concerns and offer practical solutions. As today's patients are more informed consumers, we too must keep informed of the latest technology to assist our patients as co-therapists in their pursuit of wellness.

About the author:

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¹ Effectiveness of dental Floss, J Dent Res. 58(3): 1034-1039, March 1979

² Comparative Effectiveness of Flossing and Brushing in Reducing Interproximal Bleeding, J. Periodontal, May 1989

³ 1999, Patient Use Test, among those patients with a preference

⁴ 1999, Dentist Use Test, among those hygienists with a preference

⁵ 1999, Dentist Use Test, among those dentists with a preference