

# Benefits Spotlight

News for *You*. News to *Share* with your Employees.

## Q&A with Dr. Jeff: Why Do My Gums Bleed When I Floss?

Many of us have a long list of excuses for why we avoid flossing, and a common one is that it sometimes makes our gums bleed. Have you ever wondered why gums may bleed after flossing? Dr. Jeffrey Chaffin, Vice-President and Dental Director for Delta Dental of Iowa, sheds light on the issue (and, no, it doesn't mean you should stop flossing).

### Q: Why do my gums bleed when I floss?

**Dr. Chaffin:** If you routinely floss and have dental cleanings, your gums don't normally bleed. When gums do bleed, it's normally because bacteria and plaque accumulate between the teeth and at the gumline, and they irritate and inflame the gums. The flossing then pushes on these irritated areas, which then triggers the bleeding.

### Q: If my gums are bleeding, should I stop flossing? Or change the type of floss I use?

**Dr. Chaffin:** If your gums are bleeding, you should not stop flossing. There are a few things to think about.

First, consider the technique that you are using. If you are being too rough or using the wrong technique, that can cause bleeding. If you think that may be what's going on, discuss this with your dentist or dental hygienist.

The second potential issue is that you are not having routine preventive dental appointments and having the bacteria and plaque removed.

The third potential issue is that you may have active gum disease that you want to address with your dentist.

### Q: What are ways to reduce floss-related gum bleeding?

**Dr. Chaffin:** The best way to reduce bleeding is by having good oral home hygiene (brushing twice a day and flossing once a day) and keeping up with your twice yearly dental preventive visits as well.

**Q: There are more options than the old-school string floss on the market to encourage people to floss. Are string floss alternatives a better option to reduce bleeding?**

**Dr. Chaffin:** The best floss for someone to use is the floss that they will actually use. I used to tell people in the Army that you only need to floss the teeth that you want to keep. For those who have challenges with string floss, there are various disposable flossers on the market. These flossers can be good to get between the teeth, but they don't "wrap" around the front and back of the teeth as well as the traditional string floss. But if you like these disposable flossers better than string, that is certainly better than nothing.

**Q: Bleeding gums seem like a common oral health complaint, but is it ever a sign of a larger health problem? When is it important to call my dentist about bleeding gums?**

**Dr. Chaffin:** Gum disease can be related to many health issues, including diabetes. Just because your gums bleed doesn't mean you have another health issue, but you should mention it to your dentist so he or she can address the bleeding gums and ensure there aren't larger issues at play, like gum disease or diabetes.

**Q: Flossing is something a lot of people avoid. What's your best tip to get people to floss more often and more comfortably?**

**Dr. Chaffin:** When I was in the Army — even when we were out in the "field" — I still flossed every day. Behavior change is hard, and that's what it takes to be a routine flosser. Some say it takes up to 90 days to make something new part of your lifestyle. Try to make flossing part of your morning or night routine. Once it's part of your regular routine, it's quite easy to maintain it.

## **Break Time: 5 Tips to Prevent Digital Eye Strain**

Staring at screens is a virtually unavoidable part of working in the modern era, but keeping your eyes locked on a device all day can hurt your vision.

It's true: Computer vision syndrome is a legitimate health concern. Computer vision syndrome refers to a group of disorders caused by staring at digital screens, such as computers, smartphones and tablets. This can cause dry eyes, blurry vision and eye strain, which can even lead to headaches and pain in the neck and shoulders.

As an employer, it's important to support the health and wellness of your employees. You may not be able to remove computers and smartphones from your business, but you can help your employees use their devices in a healthier way.

### **5 Tips to Ease the Screen Strain**

Share these tips with your employees to give their eyes a well deserved break.

1. Every 20 minutes, take a one-minute break to look at anything but a screen. Set a reminder to ensure too much time doesn't pass.
2. Sit two feet back from the computer screen and place your monitor so the center of the screen is about five inches below eye level.
3. Apply an inexpensive filter screen on your device to cut down the glare.

4. Soften office lighting by using lower wattage bulbs in desk lamps and pulling down window shades during high-sun times.
5. Don't forget to blink! Blinking is among the very best ways to prevent the eyes from getting too dry.

### **What If Eye Problems Don't Go Away?**

These tips will usually provide instant relief from digital strain to employees' eyes, but if vision problems stick around, it's time to schedule an appointment with an eye care professional.

DeltaVision offers a wide network of eye specialists who can help get to the root of the problem and get your employees seeing clearly and comfortably. Delta Dental's Find a Provider tool has links to DeltaVision providers by plan, or employees can give us a call at the number on the back of their member ID card if they need a break from the screen.

### **SOURCES:**

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/diseases-and-conditions/electronic-screen-alert-avoid-this-vision-risk>

<https://www.aoa.org/healthy-eyes/eye-and-vision-conditions/computer-vision-syndrome?sso=y>