

Healthy You

FAST FACTS FOR YOUR HEALTH

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.

Is Lemon Water Good for Health but Bad for Your Teeth?

When it comes to simple ways to improve your health, it doesn't get easier than squeezing half a lemon into a glass of water. Adding lemon water to your daily routine can boost potassium and vitamin C levels, help you lose weight (especially if it replaces your morning juice) and may even prevent kidney stones.

That's a lot of good news, but your teeth have a different story to tell.

Lemon juice is acidic, which can cause the enamel (the outer covering of your tooth) to wear down. When your enamel wears down, your teeth can become stained and sensitive. And when you lose your enamel, you can't repair or regrow it.

A Safer Way to Sip Lemon Water

Fortunately, you don't need to avoid lemon water and its host of health benefits for the sake of your teeth. These four tips will make your lemon drink much more mouth friendly.

1. Wait to brush and floss your teeth. It's a good habit to brush and floss after every meal, but wait at least 30 minutes after drinking lemon water or other acidic foods and beverages. This will give your teeth some time to recover from the acid. If you brush and floss immediately after drinking lemon water, you may end up doing more harm than good by brushing at the sensitive enamel.
2. Don't overdrink it. Having a once daily lemon water will do considerably less damage to your teeth than a three-times daily habit.
3. Sip it through a straw. Straws are a great way to help move the acid away from your teeth.

4. Rinse with water. Yes, it's not as fun as lemon water, but swishing with some plain 'ol water after you finish your lemony glass will help wash away any lingering acid off your teeth.

Making simple habits part of your regular routine is often the most successful path toward a healthier life. If lemon water is something that makes you feel good, consider these four tooth-friendly tips. Your enamel will thank you.

SOURCE

<https://health.clevelandclinic.org/7-reasons-to-start-your-day-with-lemon-water-infographic/>

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