Keeping clean in between— a quick guide:

Brush your teeth—twice a day, for at least two minutes.

Clean in between teeth daily before brushing— morning or night, it's up to you.

Bleeding gums may be a sign of gum disease and should stop after a few days of regular interdental cleaning. If bleeding persists, consult your dentist.

Follow your interdental cleaning plan—ask your dentist to identify the areas of your mouth on this diagram that you should pay special attention to:
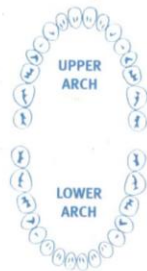
UPPER ARCH

LOWER ARCH

Keeping clean in between

Interdental care for healthy teeth and gums
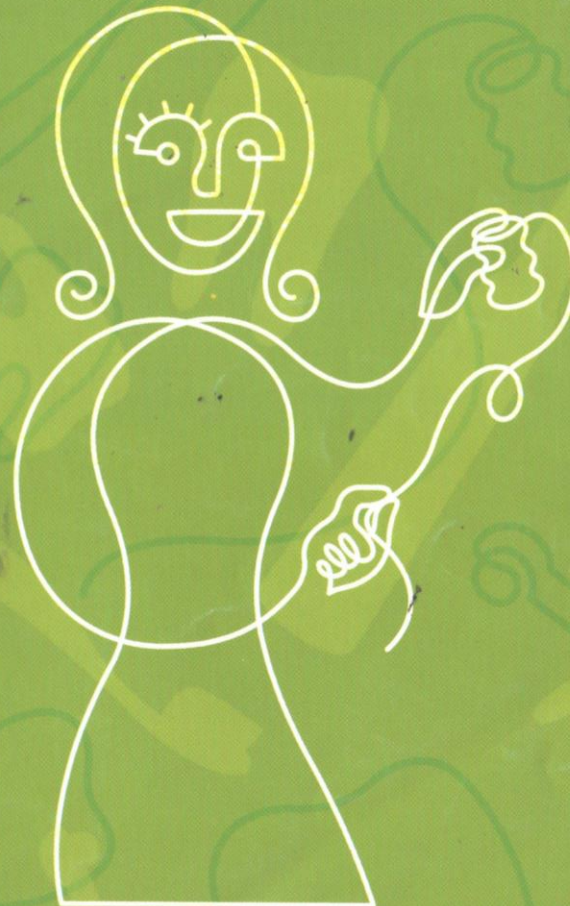
What causes gum disease?

One of the main causes of gum disease is *plaque*— a sticky, colorless film of bacteria that is constantly forming on your teeth. If plaque is allowed to build up on your teeth and along your gumline, it can cause your gums to become infected and swollen.

Am I at risk for gum disease?

Yes, gum disease can affect you at any age; however, it most often affects adults. In fact, about three out of four adults over age 35 have gum disease now or have had it in the past.

Your risk of getting gum disease may increase if you smoke or have certain medical conditions. It is therefore vital to keep your dentist informed of your general health.

Can I tell if I have gum disease?

You may have gum disease if you notice that:

- Your gums are tender, swollen, or red.
- Your gums bleed when you brush or floss.
- You can't get rid of bad breath or a bad taste in your mouth.
- There's pus from your gumline or between your teeth.
- Your teeth are loose or separating.
- Your teeth or dentures no longer fit together correctly.

What should I do if I think I have gum disease?

Visit your dentist right away for a cleaning and exam. In most cases, gum disease can be reversed or controlled if caught and treated early enough.

Better yet, by cleaning your teeth properly every day and making regular dental visits you can help prevent gum disease from ever developing.

But remember, cleaning your teeth is a *two-step process* of brushing first followed by cleaning in between your teeth—to get to areas your toothbrush can't reach.

How should I be cleaning in between my teeth?

There are many ways to clean in between your teeth, like flossing. Did you know that if you don't floss, you're leaving up to 40% of your tooth surfaces untouched and uncleaned?

How long does it take for flossing to start paying off?

The fact is, flossing provides unmistakable benefits *that start from day one*. After flossing, your teeth and gums feel cleaner because the floss reaches areas your toothbrush can't. Your breath will be fresher, and the health of your gums will improve.
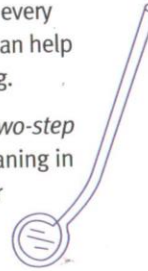
If you're not used to flossing, it can seem hard to do at first. But it's the same as taking up a new form of exercise—like learning to ride a bicycle: it just takes a bit of practice. Pretty soon, you'll feel the difference and find that it becomes part of your daily routine, just like brushing your teeth.

How should I floss?

1. *Take about 50 cm of floss and loosely wrap most of it around each middle finger (wrapping more around one finger than the other), leaving 5 cm of floss in between.*

2. *With your thumbs and index fingers holding the floss taut, gently slide it down between your teeth, while being careful not to snap it down on your gums.*

3. *Curve the floss around each tooth in a "C" shape and gently move it up and down the sides of each tooth, including under the gumline. Unroll a new section of floss as you move from tooth to tooth.*

I've heard that flossing can make gums bleed; should I stop if this happens?

No. Don't worry about your gums bleeding at first—this is quite common. It may be a sign that you have some form of gum disease. After a few days of flossing, the bleeding should stop as your gums become healthier. If bleeding persists, consult your dentist.

Is floss the only way to clean in between?

In addition to floss, there are other products designed for cleaning between your teeth. Ask your dentist or hygienist to help you determine which products are best for you.
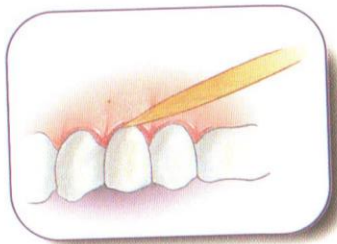
Interdental brushes

If you have widely spaced teeth, braces, bridges, or implants, you may benefit from an interdental toothbrush. This toothbrush has a very small tapered or cylindrical head with fine bristles.
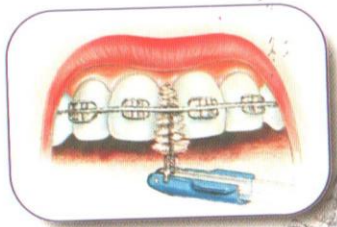
Interdental woodsticks

This is a triangular-shaped stick made of wood, used to help clean in between your teeth and massage your gums.

I've never cleaned in between my teeth before; is it too late to start?

Absolutely not. Whatever your age, *interdental cleaning provides major benefits to your teeth and gums that you'll notice right away*—so the sooner you start, the better. Interdental cleaning makes your teeth and gums feel clean because it reaches areas a toothbrush can't reach. It also keeps your breath fresh and, more importantly, it can stop gum disease in its tracks.

Isn't tooth loss a natural part of growing old?

Gum disease and tooth loss are not an inevitable part of the aging process. The fact is, you can have control over your *dental destiny*. If you brush and floss every day and see your dentist regularly, you will improve your chances of maintaining healthy teeth and gums throughout your life.

Keep it clean!

When you think about it, *keeping clean in between* simply finishes the job brushing starts. And when you do a good job at home, you'll also find that your visits to the dentist become more pleasant and relaxing, too. So keep up the good work—and keep cleaning in between!