

THERE IS NO HEALTH WITHOUT GOOD ORAL HEALTH*

By Carol Van Aernam, RDH, BA

Question: I heard we shouldn't use dental floss anymore, is that true?

Answer: Recently you may have read or heard that the latest dietary guidelines for Americans, issued by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Health and Human Services removed any reference of flossing. That led to some saying that flossing isn't important to good oral health. The American Dental Association, American Dental Hygienist Association and several other groups have responded stating that brushing your teeth twice a day and using an interdental cleaner, like floss, is important in preventing disease.

Question: Why is the use of dental floss being questioned?

Answer: Most people do not use dental floss correctly. We need to use an interdental cleaner that best fits the needs of the person served, which depends on the space between teeth, missing teeth, bridges, implants, braces or partial dentures.

Question: Is an interdental cleaner the same thing as dental floss?

Answer: There are many types of interdental cleaners that can be used to clean between the teeth.

- Dental floss, if used correctly (several types of floss, floss handles, flossers, and floss picks.)
- Small brushes with varying sizes of brushes that fit between the teeth, the center wire of the brush should be covered with plastic or rubber (Proxibrush, Sulca Brush, Soft Picks.)
- Wooden and plastic sticks or picks.
- Oral irrigation devices (Waterpik Water Flosser and the Sonicare Air Flosser.)

Question: Why is it important to use an interdental device?

Answer: Brushing alone does not clean between the teeth. We need to remove the plaque, debris and bacteria which contribute to bleeding gums, cavities and gum disease (periodontal disease.) Doing so will:

- Reduce the risk of heart disease, uncontrolled diabetes, and pneumonia.
- Reduce or eliminate bad breath.
- Reduce the cost of dental treatment.

*Surgeon General, Report on Oral Health, 2000

All health and long term service and support (LTSS) professionals/caregivers are expected to work within their Scopes of Practice or job descriptions as defined by the State or employer. Family caregivers are encouraged to contact the dental or medical provider before making changes to a loved one's care plan.

**For additional
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Meet Carol, a Registered Dental Hygienist and a Mouth Care Matters consultant and instructor.

Carol Van Aernam is a Mouth Care Matters (MCM) instructor and consultant for Iowa CareGivers. She plays a key role in planning, promoting, and teaching MCM. Carol worked in private dental practice for several years and 34 years for the Veterans Administration and Central Iowa Health Care System as a dental hygienist. She specializes in geriatric care and has presented programs at the local and national levels to those who work in direct care, dietitians, dentists, dental hygienists, and other caregivers. In addition, Carol served as an adjunct instructor for Des Moines Area Community College (DMACC) and the University of Iowa.

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