



To floss, or not to floss? Is that the question?



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The media was excited recently to learn that floss is apparently not effective to keep your teeth healthy. They have read a review¹ stating there is a low level of evidence that tooth brushing alone is less effective than tooth brushing and flossing. From there we were exposed to titles like “A big problem with flossing,”² “Feeling guilty about not flossing? Maybe there’s no need,”³ and “Tell your dentist to suck it: there’s little evidence flossing works.”⁴ This is an amazing example of misuse of scientific reports by the media. It is our job to firmly correct those mistakes and make sure that the public is well aware of the true meaning of these studies.

We should advocate and explain to our patients as well as to the media representatives that this report does not actually recommend not to clean interproximally, but it says that flossing might not be the perfect tool for it. It is well known that the two most important oral diseases – caries and periodontal disease – are caused by bacteria, so it is extremely important for oral health to remove the plaque on a regular basis. The plaque should be removed from all tooth surfaces including the interdental space. The main problem with using floss is that it is rather difficult to floss effectively, especially if you are not well trained in doing so. This is the key reason for the findings in the studies. If you have a tool and you are not using it properly, it does not work!

It is our responsibility either to make sure our patients are well educated and trained in flossing or to

introduce them to other, easier to use, interdental cleaning aids such as interproximal brushes or dental toothpicks.⁵⁻⁷ It is our role to help our peers, our patients, and the media to make proper interpretations of the evidence and not to draw the opposite conclusions. If we really care about our patients and the public dental health we need to speak up and explain what the results of these studies actually mean. It does not mean at all that interdental cleaning is not important – on the contrary, it is crucial! But it should be done properly, using the right tools. Let’s go out and make sure people understand that.

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