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## Other ways to clean between the teeth

It is well known that cleaning between one's teeth is associated with a significant decrease in caries (cavities), periodontal disease, and loss of teeth. To supplement your at-home brushing and flossing, your dentist or hygienist may suggest one or more of the following:

- **Interdental cleaners** — These cleaners work better than floss for people who have large spaces between their teeth. Some look like tiny brushes. Others look like three-sided, wide toothpicks. These cleaners also work well in people who have braces or missing teeth, and in people who have had gum surgery. You can find them at most grocery stores and drugstores. They come in many sizes. Ask your dentist or dental hygienist for assistance in selecting the best size and product for your teeth.
- **Oral irrigators** — These are electrical devices. They pump water in a steady or pulsating stream. They do not seem to remove plaque that is attached to the tooth. But they are great for flushing out food and debris in pockets between teeth, or in braces. They also are used to deliver medicine to hard-to-reach areas. For example, prescription rinses can be sprayed into gum pockets with an oral irrigator.
- **Interdental tip** — These flexible rubber nibs are used to clean between the teeth and just below the gum line. Plaque and bits of food can be removed by gently running the tip along the gum line.
- **Mouthwashes and rinses** — As with toothpaste, your choice of mouthwash or rinse will be guided by your mouth care needs. Over-the-counter rinses can freshen the breath, add fluoride or kill the bacteria that cause gingivitis. Some mouthwashes are designed to help loosen plaque before you brush. Ask your dentist or hygienist to recommend the rinse that would be best for you. If you need to avoid alcohol, read ingredient labels carefully. Many over-the-counter mouthwashes contain high amounts of alcohol. In some cases, your dentist might prescribe a stronger fluoride or antibacterial rinse for you.
- **Powered interdental brushes** — These are devices for effective removal of plaque and debris between teeth. There are several models approved by the American Dental Association for interdental cleaning.



It is important to realize that brushing alone only removes about half of all the plaque and food debris on your teeth. Flossing is a great addition to brushing, however for many people additional devices can help to maintain good dental and periodontal health.

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## References

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