

The Dental Habit Linked to Better Heart Health (but Most People Skip It)

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Flossing takes only minutes yet slashes health risks, with regular flossers showing up to 44% lower odds of certain strokes and reduced chances of irregular heart rhythms
- › Long-term research following more than 6,000 adults found flossing even once a week is linked to healthier arteries, fewer strokes, and protection against atrial fibrillation (AFib), a dangerous heart rhythm disorder
- › Scientists concluded that flossing itself stood out as protective, offering benefits independent of brushing, dentist visits, or other lifestyle habits that usually influence cardiovascular and overall health outcomes
- › Gum bacteria that escape into the bloodstream trigger inflammation, artery hardening, and clots; flossing interrupts this chain reaction, giving your heart and brain measurable protection over time
- › Beyond heart health, studies show flossing daily reduces all-cause mortality by lowering systemic inflammation, suggesting this habit not only extends life but also safeguards brain function and memory

Did you know that your oral health is directly tied to your heart health? According to one study, there's one simple habit that makes a significant difference in your risk for cardiovascular problems — flossing.

Research presented at a major conference in 2025 found that people who flossed at least once a week had lower risks of stroke and irregular heart rhythms compared to those who skipped it. Yet, studies say that two-thirds of people skip this part of their daily hygiene routine.

Flossing Shows Big Rewards for Cardiovascular Health

A preliminary study presented at the American Stroke Association's 2025 International Stroke Conference earlier this year found stronger evidence associating flossing with a reduced risk of severe cardiovascular illnesses – and these benefits appeared independently of other dental habits, such as brushing and/or regular visits to the dentist.^{1,2}

- **The report was based on the Atherosclerosis Risk in Communities (ARIC) study** – This large-scale investigation began in 1987 and continues to track thousands of participants across decades. The research team examined more than 6,000 adults, assessing their use of dental floss using a structured questionnaire.
- **The flossing habits of the participants were compared to their risk of cardiovascular health problems** – These include stroke and [atrial fibrillation \(AFib\)](#), an irregular heartbeat that greatly increases stroke risk. The researchers found that 4,092 participants who reported flossing had not experienced a stroke, while 4,050 had not been diagnosed with AFib.
- **The research involved a 25-year follow-up** – During this period, 434 strokes were recorded. These were further divided into larger artery brain clots (147), heart-driven clots (97), and hardening of the smaller arteries (95). Nearly 1,300 cases of AFib were also recorded.
- **Flossing, even just once a week, appeared to have significant benefits** – According to the researchers' analysis, the participants who reported flossing at least once per week had a 44% lower risk of cardioembolic stroke, 22% lower risk of ischemic stroke, and 12% lower risk of AFib.

- **The researchers also noted that flossing itself stood out as an independent protective behavior** — The results held true even after accounting for brushing, dental visits, and other lifestyle factors. According to study lead author Souvik Sen, M.D., M.S., M.P.H:

"Oral health behaviors are linked to inflammation and artery hardening. Flossing may reduce stroke risk by lowering oral infections and inflammation and encouraging other healthy habits. Many people have expressed that dental care is costly. Flossing is a healthy habit that is easy to adopt, affordable and accessible everywhere."³

However, the researchers note that these findings are preliminary, and that flossing alone is not enough to get rid of heart health issues; it is still essential to follow healthy lifestyle habits like eating a balanced diet, being physically active, getting enough rest, and avoiding smoking and alcohol intake.

How Does Flossing Reduce Heart Disease Risk?

The findings of this preliminary study cement the notion that oral health is closely connected to your heart. Considering that tooth decay and gum disease now affect 3.5 billion people globally,⁴ these findings serve as a wake-up call that your oral health needs to be given more stringent attention.

- **Pathogenic bacteria in your gums don't stay confined to your mouth** — They travel throughout your body. Once they enter the bloodstream, they contribute to inflammation in your arteries. This puts you at risk of atherosclerosis, or the hardening of the arteries, and blood clots. Chronic inflammation also raises your risk of heart attack and stroke.
- **Flossing helps reduce pathogenic oral bacteria** — What makes flossing more beneficial than brushing alone is it helps remove food particles and plaque between your teeth more efficiently. Plaque, if left inside your mouth, turns into tartar, which cannot be removed by regular brushing or flossing, only through dental services.

Tartar needs to be removed, as this is the damage that leads to tooth decay and tooth loss. According to Dr. Karen Furie, neurologist-in-chief at Brown University Health in Providence, Rhode Island:

"Things that cause inflammation to the gums might be retained food or seeds, things that if not removed might inflame the gums and contribute to a systemic inflammatory state that might affect the health of the blood vessels."⁵

- **This explains why cardioembolic strokes showed the strongest risk reduction among regular flossers** – These are clots that start in the heart and travel to the brain. Healthy gums reduce the bacterial load, lowering the chance of dangerous clot development.
- **Other studies have reported similar findings** – For example, a study published in The Journal of the American Dental Association investigated the relationship between self-reported flossing habits and the prevalence of cardiovascular disease events.
- **The researchers categorized participants based on how often they flossed** – Daily flossing appeared to have the most benefits, reducing the risk of cardiovascular health problems by 29% and death from heart disease by 36%.⁶

"Even after adjusting for sociodemographic factors and lifestyle habits, results of our large-scale analysis provided evidence that poor flossing behavior was associated with higher prevalence of CVD events and increased risk of experiencing CVD-linked mortality and elevated CRP levels," the researchers concluded.

This Simple Habit Could Even Reduce Your Risk of Premature Death

Beyond its cardioprotective effects, **flossing has been found to help reduce mortality risk**. According to the study, people who did not floss had a higher risk of dying during the follow-up period, even after adjusting for other variables.⁷

- **Flossing is linked to a longer life** – The study authors note that participants with poor flossing habits had an 8.3% all-cause mortality rate, compared to 6.3% among daily flossers. This suggests that flossing – and healthy oral habits – could have a broader influence on your health, going beyond just heart disease.⁸
- **One area that's affected by poor oral health is your brain health** – A 2023 study published in Neurology found that poor oral health has been associated with hippocampal atrophy, a condition wherein the hippocampus brain region shrinks; this is a marker for Alzheimer's disease.⁹
- **Both gum disease severity and tooth loss were linked to brain changes** – The study authors found that those with mild gum disease and fewer teeth had a faster shrinkage rate in the left hippocampus. In addition, having one less tooth increased brain shrinkage at a rate equivalent to nearly one year of brain aging.

*"In conclusion, this study revealed that having fewer teeth is associated with a faster rate of left hippocampal atrophy in patients with mild periodontitis, whereas having more teeth is associated with a faster rate of atrophy in those with severe periodontitis. This finding indicates that periodontitis may have a greater association with left hippocampal atrophy than the association exhibited by age," the researchers concluded.*¹⁰

How to Floss Properly

Flossing is one of the simplest habits to incorporate in your daily routine. It's inexpensive and time-efficient – you can do it in just a few minutes or less. But did you know that there's a proper way to floss to maximize its benefits? If you're not flossing properly, you're not getting all the unwanted particles out, allowing bacteria to thrive.

- **It's not simply popping floss in and out the gaps** — Many people are guilty of this — all they do is glide the floss in between the teeth gaps in a straight motion. Instead, make sure to pull the tape up then slightly slide it under your gum line, in a C-shape. Aim to do eight to 10 up-and-down strokes per tooth.
- **Dexterity issues? Consider soft plaque removers instead** — These materials are similar to toothpicks and help clean the spaces between your teeth with one hand. Note that if brushing, flossing, or using a plaque remover causes bleeding gums, this is a sign that bacteria are working.
- **Should you brush or floss first (and does it matter)?** The answer depends on whom you ask. Some dentists recommend flossing first simply because it gets it out of the way and lessens the risk that you'll simply skip it once you're done with brushing.

Others recommend flossing first because you can then brush away any plaque particles or food debris that have been removed. Still others advise brushing your teeth and then flossing before you rinse; this will help pull some of the toothpaste between your teeth as you floss.

- **The good news is both methods work** — What's important is you're flossing. In fact, the American Dental Association (ADA) says, "Either way is acceptable as long as you do a thorough job."¹¹
- **The right type of floss matters, too** — Ideally, find one that uses vegan wax. Most **commercially made flosses** contain "forever chemicals," which poses dangers to your well-being. If you have wider spaces between your teeth, use Super Floss, which is thicker.
- **Ready to floss?** Once you've found a brand of floss that suits you, follow these steps.

1. Use a piece of floss that is about 15 to 18 inches long and wrap each end around your index fingers.

2. Gently slide the floss between your teeth. Don't snap it down into your gums.
3. At the gum line, wrap the floss around the side of the tooth in the shape of a "C," and gently but firmly slide the floss up and down the tooth and side-to-side, making sure you get down into the gum line as well. Scrub both sides of the adjacent teeth before moving on to the next set.
4. Repeat on the rest of your teeth, including the back side of your last tooth.

Oil Pulling Complements Flossing for Better Oral Health

In addition to brushing and flossing, many people also gargle with mouthwash to help promote optimal oral health. While this sounds like good advice to follow, a better alternative is oil pulling. As the name implies, oil pulling refers to swishing oil around your mouth to "pull" bacteria away from your teeth and gums. It's an ancient technique rooted in Ayurvedic practice, which is one of the world's oldest traditional medicine systems.

- **Oil pulling is simple** – Just measure a tablespoon of organic, high-quality coconut oil and place it into your mouth (don't swallow). Swish the oil around using your cheeks and tongue. Make sure to "pull" the liquid through your teeth to eliminate any bacteria that brushing and flossing cannot reach.
- **Don't rush; take it slow and easy** – Unlike flossing, which takes only a few minutes, oil pulling lasts longer – ideally around 20 minutes. This will tire out your jaw, so to keep this from happening, relax your jaw muscles as you swish the oil around.
- **Don't swallow or gargle the oil** – The oil will be pulling bacteria from your mouth, making it thick and milky. If you feel the urge to swallow or feel tired, simply spit out the oil, take a short break and start again. However, do not spit the oil down your bathroom sink, as it will solidify and cause plumbing problems. Instead, spit out the oil into the garbage bin or in your yard, taking care not to hit the plants.

- **To supplement your oil pulling, I recommend increasing the pH levels in your mouth to help reduce bacterial growth further** — Do this by mixing 1 teaspoon of baking soda in 6 ounces of water and gargling. This will alkalize the pH of your mouth, and since bacteria thrive in an acidic environment, the increased pH will discourage growth.

To learn more about the advantages of oil pulling, read "[Why Is Oil Pulling Suddenly All the Rage?](#)" I believe that this three-step routine — brushing, flossing, and oil pulling — will give you an advantage, protecting not only your heart but your overall health as well.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) About Flossing and Heart Health

Q: How is flossing connected to heart health?

A: Flossing removes harmful bacteria and plaque from between your teeth. Without it, these bacteria enter your bloodstream, inflame your arteries, and increase your risk of heart disease, stroke, and irregular heart rhythms.

Q: How often do I need to floss to see benefits?

A: Research shows that even flossing once a week lowers stroke and atrial fibrillation risks. Daily flossing offers the strongest protection, further reducing your chances of cardiovascular problems and premature death.

Q: Isn't brushing enough to protect my heart and gums?

A: Brushing cleans tooth surfaces, but it misses the tight spaces between teeth. Flossing reaches those hidden areas where bacteria thrive, making it an

independent and necessary step for better overall health.

Q: What specific health risks are lowered by flossing?

A: Studies found flossing is linked to a 44% lower risk of cardioembolic stroke, a 22% lower risk of ischemic stroke, and a 12% lower risk of atrial fibrillation, even after adjusting for other habits.

Q: Does flossing really affect my overall lifespan?

A: Yes. Participants with poor flossing habits had higher all-cause mortality rates than daily flossers. By reducing systemic inflammation and infections, flossing supports not just oral health but also longevity and brain function.

Sources and References

- ¹ [HuffPost, July 27, 2025](#)
- ^{2, 3} [Science Daily, January 30, 2025](#)
- ⁴ [World Health Organization, November 18, 2022](#)
- ⁵ [American Heart Association, January 30, 2025](#)
- ^{6, 7, 8} [The Journal of the American Dental Association Volume 156, Issue 1, January 2025, Pages 17-27.e3](#)
- ^{9, 10} [Neurology, July 5, 2023](#)
- ¹¹ [ADA, Floss/Interdental Cleaners](#)