Did you know that you have living microbiomes in your body?
A microbiome is a community of many organisms so small we can’t see them with the human eye. They are called microorganisms, and you may have already learned about them at school. **Your mouth can have up to 700 organisms in its microbiome!** Some are good—they protect you from infection and help break down the food you eat. Others are bad and can cause cavities, gum disease and other infections. The good bacteria in your mouth also help to fight the bad ones.

When you forget to brush and floss every day, the bad bacteria can grow to out-number the good and start to eat away at your teeth and infect your gums. Your gums may become sore, swollen and may even bleed when you brush! **This is called gingivitis, an early stage of gum disease.**

If you don't take care of your gums, gingivitis will turn into a more advanced stage of gum disease called periodontitis (pare-ee-o-don-tie-tis). This can spread the infection deep within your gums and cause your teeth to get loose and fall out when you are an adult! This is not the same thing as when your baby teeth get wiggly and fall out to make room for your adult teeth! If you lose your baby teeth too early because of gum disease, it can cause lots of problems and spread infection to other parts of your body.

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**How to prevent gingivitis:**
1. Carefully brush your teeth along the edge where your teeth and gums meet—for two minutes, two times every day.

2. If your tooth touches the tooth beside it, you must also floss every day. Flossing removes the sticky plaque that hides between your teeth and just below the gumline.

Do you know how to floss properly to help prevent infections in your gums? You can learn all about it in Lesson 2!
Flossing is very important to protect your mouth from gingivitis. **If you have two teeth that touch each other, you should floss between them every day.**

**When should you floss?**

Choose the time of day that works best for you—when you can take your time and do a good job. For most people, the best time to floss is right before going to bed because they don't feel rushed.

We will learn how to make flossing a habit in Lesson 3.

Do you know how to floss correctly?

There are many different ways to clean in between your teeth. Talk to your family dentist about which is the best for YOU, because everyone is different! Traditional string floss is the tool dentists recommend most. On the next page, we have included instructions about how to use string floss from the American Dental Association (ADA) or you can watch the video above.

**Here are a few more tools that are approved by the ADA:**

**Floss Picks:** These handy tools can be easier to use than string floss, but you should still follow the tips from the video above so that you clean well without hurting your gums. **DO NOT** use the floss pick like a saw.

**Proxy Brushes:** These brushes look like tiny Christmas trees, and are especially helpful if you have gaps between your teeth or if you have braces. They have been proven to clean well as long as you're using the right size.

**Water Flossers:** This tool uses a stream of water to clean between your teeth. They can be a little bit messy until you get the hang of it (but that can be fun too!) Water flossers are also great for cleaning between your teeth if you have braces.
How to Make Flossing a Habit.

Being responsible for your healthy habits is a big part of growing up and something you can be proud of!

A **habit** is something you do without having to think about it (and without a grown-up reminding you.) It can take up to two months to learn a new habit—so stick with it. Don’t give up!

**6 Tips to Make Flossing a Habit:**

1. **You have to REALLY WANT to learn this new habit!** Every time you think of skipping your daily floss, remember the microorganisms we learned about in Lesson 1 living between your teeth. If you don’t clean them off, they will eat away at your teeth and spread infection in your gums. Yuck!

2. **Get help from a buddy.** Ask your brother or sister, parent, grandparent, or BFF to be your “flossing buddy” and floss together or remind each other to floss every day.

3. **Define your trigger.** Every habit, whether bad or good, has a trigger—something that will give you the feeling that it is time to floss. This can be something you see (like a note on your bathroom mirror or the floss container sitting beside your toothbrush,) a reminder you set on an electronic device, or simply the bad taste in your mouth that might also make you think to brush. Which leads us to our next tip....

4. **Bundle your habit.** It’s common sense to floss at the same time you brush, which should already be a habit.

5. **Reward good behavior.** Print a Flossing Reward Chart and hang it by your sink to keep track of each day you floss. At the end of the week, give yourself a small reward for flossing every day. At the end of the month, reward yourself with something bigger! (You can download a chart at AmericasToothFairy.org/resources.) Don’t let a missed day discourage you. Remember, it can take up to two months to form a new habit but nobody is perfect. **Don’t give up when you slip up!**

6. **Get the gear.** In Lesson 2 we learned about the many different ways to clean between your teeth including traditional floss, floss picks, proxy brushes, and water flossers. Try a few to see which works best for you.

*Find more oral health education resources at AmericasToothFairy.org/resources.*