



Research Findings

Eight in Ten Americans Have Used Something Other Than String Floss, a Water Flosser, an Interdental Brush or A Toothpick to Remove Something Stuck in Their Teeth

Nearly Two Thirds Admit They Have Done This Despite Knowing They Should be Using Proper Dental Products

Chicago, IL, October 18, 2017 — Most Americans say that they have used something other than string floss, a water flosser, an interdental brush or a toothpick to floss or remove something stuck in their teeth (79%), with the most common ‘unusual items’ used including fingernails (61%) and folded paper or cards (40%). According to the recent online study conducted by Ipsos on behalf of the American Dental Association and Waterpik, roughly a quarter have also used a thread/string (27%) or some form of cutlery (21%, fork, knife, or spoon) in order to remove something lodged in their teeth, and more than one in ten have resorted to using a paper clip (17%) or safety pin (14%). Not quite as many say that they have tried using an earring post (7%), piece of hair (7%), or other item (4%) to remove something stuck in their teeth. On the other hand, one in five (21%) say that they have never used any of these items for such reasons, including a greater proportion of older adults (29%, ages 55+) and retirees (28%).

- Although most people admit to using an unusual item to floss or remove something stuck in their teeth, seeing people clean their teeth in public is considered to be gross by nearly three quarters (72%). Those most likely to be grossed out by people cleaning their teeth in public include adults over the age of 55 (78% vs. 63%, 18-34), the more affluent (75% vs. 67%, earning less than \$50,000 annually), and those with a college degree (78% vs. 66%, no college degree).

More than two in five (42%) say they have felt pain as a result of removing something stuck in their teeth with an unusual item, with gum pain (35%) much more common than tooth pain (13%). The other half of those surveyed say that they have never felt pain while trying to floss or remove something stuck in their teeth with an unusual item (55%), and 3% don’t know.

- Younger adults (59%, ages 18-34 vs. 23%, 55+) and parents (60% vs. 35%, no kids) are significantly more likely to report experiencing gum and tooth pain as a result of cleaning their teeth with an unusual object. These segments were also much more likely to be cleaning their teeth in such ways to begin with.

Just under two thirds (63%) admit that they have used an unusual object to remove something stuck in their teeth despite knowing they should be using proper dental products, and this is especially true for adults under the age of 35 (72% vs. 54%, 55+) and parents (72% vs. 60%, no kids).

Dental Hygiene Practices

There is no denying the importance Americans place on flossing as being an essential part of taking care of teeth and gums (95%, agree). Nearly eight in ten Americans say that they have a specific brushing/flossing routine that they follow everyday (79%), and another two thirds (66%) report going to the dentist regularly, even when they don’t have any specific dental problems. However, 44% admit that they have exaggerated to their dentist about how much they floss when asked.

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Research Findings – continued –

- Women, the more affluent, those with a college degree, and those who are married are much more likely to agree that flossing is an essential part of taking care of their teeth and gums when compared to men, those earning less, those without a college degree, and those who are not married, respectively. These segments are also more likely to have a specific brushing/flossing routine that they follow every day.
- On the other hand, men (48% vs. 40% women), those under the age of 35 (60% vs. 30%, 55+), and parents (52% vs. 40%, no kids) stand out as being especially likely to have exaggerated to their dentist about how much they floss when asked.

When it comes to how much Americans are cleaning between their teeth with string floss or other interdental cleaner as part of their oral hygiene routine over the course of a week, a third (34%) say that they typically floss every day - including 16% who report they *always* floss once a day, if not more. One in ten typically floss 4-5 times a week (12%), while just over a quarter report flossing anywhere from 1-3 times a week (27%). One out of every five adults surveyed (20%) say they only floss when they need to/when something is stuck in their teeth, and one in ten say they simply never floss (8%).

- The biggest reason for not flossing among those who do not floss at least once a day is because it is too time consuming (55%). Another 16% find flossing painful and avoid it for this reason, while one in ten don't floss as much because they find it expensive (9%) or gross (9%). A quarter (27%) mention some other reason, with top mentions including forgetfulness and laziness.

When it comes to how often Americans are visiting their dentist, half of those surveyed report going every 6 months or more (50%) – although this jumps to roughly six in ten among older adults (59%, 55+), higher income earners (60%, \$50,000 or more), the more educated (62%, college degree), and those who are married (57%). Just under one in five (18%) say they visit their dentist annually, while fewer go once every 2-3 years (7%). One in ten say that they only go see their dentist when they have a tooth/gum issue (11%), while just as many admit they rarely/never go to the dentist (13%).

About the Study

These are the findings from an Ipsos poll conducted June 27-28, 2017 on behalf of the American Dental Association and Waterpik. For the survey, a sample of 1,005 adults over the age of 18 from the continental U.S., Alaska and Hawaii was interviewed online, in English. The precision of Ipsos online polls is measured using a credibility interval. In this case, the poll has a credibility interval of plus or minus 3.5 percentage points for all respondents surveyed.

The sample for this study was randomly drawn from Ipsos's online panel (see link below for more info on "Access Panels and Recruitment"), partner online panel sources, and "river" sampling (see link below for more info on the Ipsos "Ampario Overview" sample method) and does not rely on a population frame in the traditional sense. Ipsos uses fixed sample targets, unique to each study, in drawing sample. After a sample has been obtained from the Ipsos panel, Ipsos calibrates respondent characteristics to be representative of the U.S. Population using standard procedures such as raking-ratio adjustments. The source of these population targets is U.S. Census 2016 American Community Survey data. The sample drawn for this study reflects fixed sample targets on demographics. Post-hoc weights were made to the population characteristics on gender, age, region, race/ethnicity and income.

Statistical margins of error are not applicable to online polls. All sample surveys and polls may be subject to other sources of error, including, but not limited to coverage error and measurement error. Where figures do not sum to 100, this is due to the effects of rounding. The precision of Ipsos online polls is measured using a credibility interval. In this case, the poll has a credibility interval of plus or minus 3.5 percentage points for all respondents (see link below for more info on Ipsos online polling "Credibility Intervals").

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Ipsos calculates a design effect (DEFF) for each study based on the variation of the weights, following the formula of Kish (1965). This study had a credibility interval adjusted for design effect of the following (n=1,005, DEFF=1.5, adjusted Confidence Interval=5.0).

For more information about conducting research intended for public release or Ipsos' online polling methodology, please visit our [Public Opinion Polling and Communication](#) page where you can download our brochure, see our public release protocol, or contact us.

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