

## «Dental floss is actually only suitable for the front teeth.»



Thomas Imfeld is a professor of Preventive Dental Medicine and Oral Epidemiology at the University of Zurich. He is a founding member of the «Preventive Oral Health Association», which was formed in June 2009. At iTOP seminars as they are known, this association teaches periodontitis prophylaxis to dentists and dental hygienists worldwide about the correct way to clean teeth.

### **Why is cleaning between the teeth so important?**

A toothbrush is actually unable to reach the interdental spaces. In my opinion, mechanical interdental cleaning for the primary prevention of caries in interdental spaces is not indicated if there are no carious lesions and/or restoration, since the possible damage outweighs any proven benefits. However, if there is already an interdental carious lesion or even a restoration (filling), then interdental cleaning is necessary.

### **What is the situation regarding periodontitis?**

The same applies to periodontitis. Interdental cleaning as primary prophylaxis is not indicated for patients without periodontal problems in the interdental spaces or periodontal risk factors. However, if there are periodontal issues or if treatment for periodontitis has already been carried out in an interdental space (e.g. scaling), mechanical interdental cleaning is absolutely vital as tertiary prophylaxis (against any recurrence of periodontitis).

### **For daily interdental cleaning, this means: it is indicated if there is a risk of interdental caries or periodontitis or if interdental restorations or periodontal treatment have been carried out?**

Yes, and – as I said – if there are periodontal risk factors such as diabetes mellitus or HIV, smoking tobacco and emotional stress, too. The possibility of genetic disposition is also suspected. This is clinically manifest in an increase in the incidence of family periodontal disease.

### **Is dental floss suitable for cleaning between the teeth?**

Actually, only for the front teeth. Dental floss is unsuitable for premolars and molars due to their anatomical shape (cross-section of tooth roots).

### **It is therefore better to clean with interdental brushes than with dental floss if, for example, the premolars or molars have fillings?**

Yes, interdental brushes can reach the root surfaces of premolars and molars very well. However, patients need to be carefully instructed in their use.

### **What is your motivation for becoming so heavily involved in dental prophylaxis?**

Well, natural teeth are better than artificial ones.

### **How can dentists best help their patients to have healthy teeth for life?**

By always reminding themselves that dental medicine is primarily about retaining teeth and not about replacing teeth. A belief in technology should not take precedence over biological thinking.

These questions were put by Raymond Dettwiler, International Marketing & Sales Director, Curaden International AG.