

## History of the dental floss

This is a part of The Encyclopedia of History of Dentistry.

### **Dr. Andrew I. Spielman, DMD, Ph.D.,**

Professor of Molecular Pathobiology, Director of the Rare Book Library and Historical Archives,  
New York University College of Dentistry, New York, NY, USA.

[ais1@nyu.edu](mailto:ais1@nyu.edu)

### **Dr. Forrai Judith, D.Sc.,**

Semmelweis University, Institute of Public Health, Department of History of Medicine, Budapest, Hungary

[forrajjud@gmail.com](mailto:forrajjud@gmail.com)

*Initially submitted: 28 March, 2023; accepted for publication 15 April 2023*

*Please cite this article as: History of the dental floss. In: Encyclopedia of the History of Dentistry. Forrai J, Spielman AI eds. 2023. Doi: [10.32558/encyclopedia.dentistry.4](https://doi.org/10.32558/encyclopedia.dentistry.4), [10.17107/KH.2023.26.26](https://doi.org/10.17107/KH.2023.26.26)*

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**Abstract:** Oral hygiene was not a focus before the end of the 19th century.

**Keywords:** *toothbrush, dental floss, dentifrice, halitosis, miswak, mouthwash, oral hygiene, toothpaste, toothpick*

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Oral hygiene was not a focus before the end of the 19th century. With the realization of the harm oral bacteria can cause, priorities changed. However, even without much understanding of the bacterial nature of the oral disease, as early as 1815, Levi Spear Parmly, a dentist and “father of oral hygiene,” advocated cleaning the interdental spaces using waxed silk threads. Parmly came from a prosperous family of dentists and practiced in New Orleans. In his 1818 book, *A Practical Guide to the Management of the Teeth*, he suggested the need to brush, use a dentifrice polisher and a “waxed silken thread ...placed .. through the interstices of the teeth, between their necks and the arches of the gums to dislodge that irritating matter which no brush can remove (1).

Dental “floss silk” became mass-marketed by the S.S. White Company of Philadelphia in 1866 (2). The first patent for dental floss was awarded in 1898 to Johnson and Johnson Co. Initially, dental floss was sold in small glass, paper, or metal tubes/boxes. Dr. Charles C. Bass, a medical doctor in the early 1940s, introduced nylon dental floss to replace silk, a more economical solution.

Today floss comes as a nylon thread, tape made of polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE), rubber, or plastic. Most of the floss no longer comes with wax. As an alternative to dental flossing, an interdental brush was introduced in 1980. Only 30% of the population practices flossing.

## References

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<https://archive.org/details/2566032R.nlm.nih.gov>
2. S.S.White Dental Catalogue of Dental Materials Furniture and Instruments. p.215, 1867.



1. *Figure. A Johnson & Johnson dental floss (1882)*