White stuff on gums? [1]

Dear Alice,

When I wake up in the morning, I have a layer of stringy white stuff lining my bottom gums. Can you help me identify this?

Answer

Dear Reader,

The “stringy white stuff” that you’re referring to could be a buildup of plaque — a sticky film of bacteria that forms around and between teeth. If excess plaque is not removed, it can cause halitosis [2] (bad breath), gum disease, or tooth decay. But don’t fret; there are several ways to remove this slimy substance and prevent it from coming around again! The best way is as easy as brushing and flossing more often and more carefully.

Poor oral hygiene and frequent ingestion of sugary foods may lead to plaque build-up. If it’s not cleaned off regularly, plaque can harden to form tartar (which is harder to remove with just a brush and floss), creating favorable conditions for more bacteria to grow. If the bacteria continues to grow and gets caught in the pockets between your gums and your teeth, gingivitis (a gum infection) and the more serious periodontitis infection can occur. Symptoms of periodontitis may include bad breath, gums that are red, shiny, tender, or bloody, and loose teeth.

Now, you may be wondering how you can stop all this from occurring. The fastest route to string-free gums is to brush your teeth at least twice a day using a soft-bristled toothbrush. Holding your toothbrush at a slight angle and brushing the inner, outer, and chewing surfaces of your teeth can prevent bacteria from forming. A worn out toothbrush won’t be very effective, so it’s recommended that you replace it periodically.

Along with brushing, when it comes to oral health, floss is your friend! It’s a good idea to incorporate the use of floss daily (especially before bedtime) to remove plaque from those hard-to-reach crevices between your teeth. This can help get rid of the leftover dinner in your teeth and prevent gum disease. While mouthwash leaves you with that fresh breath feeling, swooshing alone won’t provide enough plaque removal to keep your gums clean.
Beyond self-care strategies, it’s recommended that you visit your dentist for routine cleanings and oral exams to help keep your pearly whites clean and healthy (the frequency of which may be determined by you and your dentist). If your symptoms persist, an appointment for professional removal of dental plaque and tartar, called root planing and scaling, may be in order.

May your healthy mouth be a happy mouth!

Alice!

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