Researchers have found that flossing before brushing may be the ideal sequence for the most thorough removal of dental plaque. The report is featured in the Journal of Periodontology (JOP).

Titled “The Effect of Toothbrushing and Flossing Sequence on Interdental Plaque Reduction and Fluoride Retention: A Randomized Controlled Clinical Trial,” the study assessed 25 participants who were asked to brush their teeth first, then use dental floss to clean the spaces between their teeth (brush-floss).

In a second phase, the same group was asked to use floss, then brush their teeth (floss-brush).

Researchers found that the amount of plaque between the teeth and in the mouth overall was significantly reduced when participants used the floss-brush approach.

The researchers contend that as flossing loosens bacteria and debris from between the teeth, brushing afterward (when the mouth is rinsed with water) further clears the mouth of these particles.

Plaque bacteria are the primary culprit behind the development of periodontal disease, an inflammatory condition that occurs when bacteria accumulate below the gum line. Periodontal disease can lead to swelling, irritation, gum recession and tooth loss if left untreated.

The study also found that fluoride, a mineral that aids in the prevention of cavities and tooth decay, remained in the mouth at higher levels when participants flossed before brushing.