



# Mouth Care - a guide for carers

A healthy mouth contributes to a person's general health, comfort, self-esteem and quality of life.

## What can you do?

Look out for any signs, symptoms or behavioural changes that may indicate mouth problems. This is especially important for a person who is unable to communicate verbally. Ensure they have regular dental check-ups and follow professional advice.

## Oral hygiene

- Supervise, assist or carry out oral hygiene ensuring that plaque (bacteria) is removed thoroughly from teeth. Clean teeth in the morning and before bed at night.
- Use the type of toothbrush and method most suitable for each person in your care. Try to make it comfortable for you and the person you're helping. Seek advice if unsure.
- You may need two carers to carry out effective mouth care.
- In a group setting, keep each person's dental care products separate to prevent them from coming in to contact with each other (cross-contamination).
- Use fluoride toothpaste. Use sensitive-teeth toothpaste for people with tooth sensitivity. Choose non-foaming toothpaste for those who 'gag'.
- High fluoride toothpaste, chlorhexidine products (anti-plaque agents) and other dental products may be prescribed by a dental practitioner for a person with a high risk of dental disease.



## Denture care

- Clean dentures with soap and water (NOT toothpaste) and store in a clean, dry container when not used.
- Keep the mouth clean by swabbing or brushing gums and tongue daily. Always wet the denture before inserting into the mouth.



## Diet

- Limit sweet, sticky foods and drinks between meals and avoid giving sweets as a 'reward'.
- Limit acidic drinks such as cordials, fruit juices and soft drinks.
- If the person is able, encourage drinking or rinsing with water to help remove food debris after a meal.

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## Toothbrush positioning

When assisting with toothbrushing try different positions to suit the situation; not all positions are safe for all people.

### Toothbrush positioning must ...

- be comfortable and safe for all involved.
- provide support for the head and neck.
- allow clear view inside the mouth and have a good light source.



### Cuddle Position is best for most cases:

- Stand behind and to the side of the person.
- Rest their head against the side of your body and arm.
- Support the chin gently with your index finger and thumb e.g. 'pistol grip'.
- Use your thumb to roll down the lower lip for better vision and access.
- This position provides greater head control, is supportive and allows the person to feel 'safe'.

**People with swallowing problems risk choking if the head is tilted back too far.**

## Toothbrushing technique

- Use a pea sized amount of fluoride toothpaste on a soft bristle toothbrush.
- Show the toothbrush, approach the person whilst explaining what you are going to do.
- Gradually move to the side/behind position ready to begin brushing.
- Place the toothbrush at a 45° angle to the gums.
- Using a gentle circular motion, clean the outside, inside and biting tooth surfaces, focusing on where the gum meets the tooth. Brush the tongue also.
- Encourage them to spit out and not rinse after brushing. The fluoride within the toothpaste will help to strengthen teeth and fight tooth decay.
- Thoroughly rinse the toothbrush, tap off any excess water and store in an open space to dry.
- Replace used toothbrushes every 3 months (e.g. at the change of each season).

**If you have any concerns speak to a dental practitioner.**

### Would you like more information or to provide feedback?

This document can be made available in alternative formats such as braille, audio tape or electronically on request.



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