

SPECIAL ORAL CARE FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH DEMENTIA

People living with dementia are at a high risk for tooth decay and gum disease and need extra support to maintain good oral health. They can often feel uncomfortable, confused and reluctant. Helpful tips include:

- Give the person short, clear instructions. If you are going to clean their teeth for them, firstly explain what you are going to do.
- Demonstrate what to do by using a "watch me" technique, using hand gestures with a toothbrush. If the person seems too agitated or uncooperative, postpone until a later time.
- If toothbrushing **cannot** be tolerated at all, at the very least try to rinse with a Chlorhexidine based mouth rinse.
- Observe the person for signs of pain or discomfort. If they are reluctant or refuse to eat or if they show signs such as grimacing / straining while eating or brushing, they may have dental pain or be struggling with ill-fitting dentures and should be referred to a dentist.

ORAL HEALTH AIDS



- Explain what you are going to do by giving clear and concise instructions
- Electric toothbrushes can be especially suitable for people with limited dexterity.
- Carers may also find them more useful for people with limited co-operation.
- Three sided toothbrushes can be helpful for carers as all tooth surfaces are brushed at once.
- Modified toothbrush handles can be used when there is reduced hand mobility due to stroke or other debilitating illnesses.
- Interdental brushes are important for removing plaque in between the teeth and should be used daily.

Routine examinations with a dental professional are essential. Domiciliary care services can be provided in a nursing home when access to a clinic is not possible. Enquire with your local HSE service or general dental practice.



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Useful links

<https://www.dentalhealth.ie/publications/list/denture-care-leaflet/>
<https://www.dentalhealth.org/denturecareguidelines>
<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/publications/primary/dental-services/oralcare%20carers.pdf>
<https://rqa.org.uk/RQA/files/12/12a65998-23a4-4610-a1f6-afe6ce2fa059.pdf>
https://www.dentalhealth.ie/assets/files/pdf/oral_hygiene_aids_3.pdf
<https://www.dementiauk.org/get-support/maintaining-health-in-dementia/mouth-care-dementia/>
http://www.ncaop.ie/publications/research/reports/Oral%20Health/454_2008.pdf
<https://www.alz.org/help-support/caregiving/daily-care/dental-care>

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IRISH DENTAL HYGIENISTS ASSOCIATION



ORAL CARE IN A NURSING HOME SETTING



DAILY ORAL CARE STEPS FOR CARERS

Always encourage and motivate residents in performing their own oral healthcare where capable and assist when necessary.

- Brush teeth twice daily with a fluoride toothpaste.
- Prior to carrying out any oral care, always explain the procedure to the person.
- Wash hands and make sure he/she is comfortable with good head support.
- Remove any dentures and place in cold water.
- Use a pea sized amount of toothpaste and a soft toothbrush.
- Gently retract the lips with your thumb and forefinger.
- Place the toothbrush at a 45 degree angle to the gum line and using gentle circular motion, move the brush across the teeth two at a time.
- Remember to brush all surfaces of the teeth starting with the outer, inner and top surfaces.
- Replace toothbrushes every 3 months.



DENTURE CARE

- Dentures should be cleaned daily with a toothbrush/denture brush to remove debris.
- Soap/water or denture cleaning paste can be used when brushing.
- Rinse dentures after meals. Do not use hot water as this can warp the denture.
- Clean over a sink/basin full of water to reduce risk of breaking the dentures if they fall.
- Leave dentures out at night time to prevent denture stomatitis (fungal infection).
- Soak nightly in a denture cleansing solution, rinse with cold water before use. Always ensure denture containers are labelled with the correct name.
- Do not soak metal dentures in any product containing bleach.
- Check regularly for sores/ulcers and refer to a dentist if not healed within 2 weeks.



DRY MOUTH

Medications can cause dry mouth which can be very uncomfortable when eating or talking. To relieve symptoms try:

- Sipping water frequently.
- Saliva substitutes (Gels, rinses, sprays)
- Sugar free gum. Avoid sucking sweets as lack of saliva means risk of tooth decay is higher.
- Use a higher % fluoride toothpaste.

