

Co-Creating Safe and Enjoyable Meals for People with Swallowing Difficulty



**Tips for Oral Hygiene and Dental Care:
Extract from Additional Resources**

Tips for Oral Hygiene and Dental Care

Provide support for oral care

- Each person needs different levels of support with brushing their teeth; they may need verbal prompting for the steps or partial or full physical assistance to complete their oral hygiene tasks. It is important to allow people to do as much as they can and support as needed.
- It is necessary for people with dentures or no teeth to brush gums daily to remove plaque and food.
- It is necessary for people who do not eat or drink with their mouth (nil by mouth, eating and drinking via a tube) to have their teeth and gums brushed daily to remove plaque and food from the gums.



Plan and prepare for oral care

- Talk to an oral health professional to create an individualised oral health care plan.
- Read the oral health care plan carefully before starting any oral hygiene procedures.
- Make sure the person is as upright as possible and in a comfortable position.
- Talk to the person to find out what they would like to do and what they would like your help with.
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water and then wear gloves.
- Get all of the oral health equipment that you need ready, which may include
 - The person's toothbrush and toothpaste, as specified in their oral health care plan
 - Water to rinse the mouth out, which may be thickened, if that is what the client drinks
 - A basin or bowl in an accessible position to spit into
 - A hand towel to dry the face



Tooth brushing

- Brush teeth in the morning and before going to bed.
- Use fluoride toothpaste to protect against tooth decay.
- Use a soft toothbrush to prevent damage to the gums.
- Stand in a comfortable position for both of you, which could be behind, to the side or in front of the person. It is important the person is comfortable, and that you can see into their mouth.
- Let the person do what they can, and then offer any support as needed.
- Tell the person what you are going to do and check that they are ok with each step before you do it.
- Brush gently in small circles or prompt the person to do so if they are brushing themselves.
- After brushing, help the person to spit out the toothpaste.



Signs of poor oral health

It is important to look for signs of dental or gum disease. If any of the following signs are observed, refer to an oral health professional:

- Bleeding gums
- Sensitive teeth
- Increased or new difficulty chewing
- Bad breath



Some of these issues arise during oral care. These can be addressed with an oral health professional:

- Pain with toothbrushing.
- Oral reflexes, including a bite reflex when a person will bite their toothbrush, or gag reflex, when a person may gag or vomit throughout oral care.

Information adapted from: Supporting Every Smile <https://everysmile.dhsv.org.au/article/daily-mouth-care-is-for-everyone/>

- Resistance to oral care because of fear or previous negative experiences.
- Distress during oral care.
- Problems with controlling the water in the mouth or spitting it out.

Coughing or choking on liquid or toothpaste during mealtimes, or pockets of food left from mealtimes could indicate a problem with swallowing safety. If any of these are observed, refer to a speech pathologist for a mealtime assessment.

Further information

- Resources that were developed to support Disability Support Practitioners in providing effective oral hygiene for people with disability are available online <https://www.nds.org.au/events-and-training/all-events-and-training/oral-hygiene-for-people-with-disability-3468>
- Information about how to support people with disability to maintain good oral hygiene, including detailed explanations and tips: <https://everysmile.dhsv.org.au/>
- Oral Health for people with Special Needs handout for support workers: <http://conditions.health.qld.gov.au/HealthCondition/media/pdf/18/156/103/oral-health-for-people-with-special-needs-v3>
- A useful brochure on oral care for support workers developed by the University of Adelaide: <https://www.adelaide.edu.au/arc poh/dperu/special/disability/Disabilities%20DL.pdf>
- This video demonstrates the steps a Direct Support Worker should take when assisting a person with disability to complete their oral hygiene routine: <https://www.ideas.org.au/video/part-2-oral-hygiene.html>