



CARER HANDOUT

Delivering good mouth care

This handout gives you the practical skills you need to deliver good mouth care. Encourage people to brush their own teeth for as long as they are able to. Sometimes a simple reminder is all that is needed.



The technique itself is less important than how well plaque is removed.

DIGNITY AND POSITION

- Make sure the person has privacy and is comfortable, and explain what you are going to do.
- Ideally, brush with the person sitting down, or in bed raised to 40–50 degrees.
- Approach from the front so they can see you, then brush from the side or behind for better access and visibility.
- Place a towel under the chin and have everything you need ready.

REMOVING DENTURES

- Place a flannel in the sink and part-fill it with cold water, so the denture won't break if it is dropped.
- Remove the dentures and brush all surfaces with mild soap or a non-abrasive denture cleaner and water. Never use toothpaste on dentures.
- Rinse well. At night, store the dentures **dry** in a clean, named denture pot.

TOOTHBRUSHING

- 1 Apply a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste** (1,350–1,500 ppm fluoride) to the person's own toothbrush, manual or electric.
- 2 Brush last thing at night and at one other time** during the day, for about 2 minutes.
- 3 Start with the outer surfaces**, using a gentle back-and-forth motion, 2–3 teeth at a time. Then brush the inner and biting surfaces, and gently brush along the gum line.
- 4 Spit, don't rinse.** Encourage the person to spit out excess toothpaste but not to rinse, so the fluoride stays in the mouth for longer and protects the teeth. If they have a dry mouth, a rinse may be needed for comfort.
- 5 Check the mouth** for sores, ulcers, bleeding or any changes while you brush, and report them.
- 6 Use interdental aids**, such as floss or interdental brushes, only if advised by a dental professional or requested by the person or their family. Focus on brushing first, to remove as much plaque as possible.

Training should be part of an ongoing programme for all health and care staff. For oral care training and advice, contact info@kohc.co.uk · 01243 710119 · www.kohc.co.uk



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Mouth care for specific needs

Health and care staff have a vital role in promoting good oral health, preventing mouth pain and poor nutrition, and reporting any changes.



Good mouth care for people who are very unwell is vital to reduce the risk of aspiration pneumonia and to improve comfort.

SWALLOWING DIFFICULTIES

- Sit the person upright for mouth care.
- If they have severe swallowing difficulties, use a dry toothbrush with no toothpaste.
- If they can tolerate some fluid, wet the toothbrush in water or mouthwash.
- If toothpaste is used, apply a small smear of non-foaming toothpaste to a small, soft-headed toothbrush.
- Don't add extra fluid to the mouth, and remove excess with damp gauze.

DEMENTIA

- Refusing mouth care is often a fear response. The person may feel threatened, which can lead to distressed behaviour.
- Problems judging space and distance can be an early symptom of dementia.
- Approach slowly from the front, at eye level, and place a hand on their shoulder so they know where you are before you start.
- Use short, simple instructions and show as well as tell.
- See our leaflet When someone resists mouth care for more tips.

END OF LIFE

- 1 Assess the mouth daily** for changes.
- 2 Clean the teeth** using a soft, small-headed toothbrush and a mild, non-foaming toothpaste.
- 3 Carry out mouth care as often as needed** to keep the mouth clean.
- 4 Use damp gauze** if the person is unconscious or cannot tolerate a toothbrush. Wet non-fraying gauze in water or mouthwash and wrap it around a gloved finger to moisten the mouth and remove debris.
- 5 Keep the lips soft** with a water-based lubricant to prevent cracking.
- 6 Keep the mouth moist:** every 30 minutes if the person is conscious, and at least every hour, or whenever possible, with water if they are unconscious.
- 7 Consider changing or stopping medicines** that cause a dry mouth, with the prescriber.

Never use foam swabs to clean or moisten the mouth. The sponge head can come off and cause choking.