



A GUIDE FOR CARERS

Cleaning and storing dentures

Including best practice for people with oral thrush

J Prosthet Dent 2020 review

NICE CKS: Candida – oral

Mouth Care Matters

WHY IT MATTERS

Dentures collect plaque, food and germs in the same way as natural teeth. If they are not cleaned and stored properly they can cause sore gums, bad breath and oral thrush (candida), and germs on dentures can be breathed into the lungs, raising the risk of chest infections. Lost or broken dentures also affect a person's ability to eat, speak and smile with confidence.

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SECTION 01

Daily denture cleaning

Clean dentures at least once a day, and rinse them after meals. Brushing is essential: soaking alone does not remove plaque.

- 1 **Wash your hands and put on gloves.** Use a separate, labelled denture brush and pot for each person.
- 2 **Remove the dentures.** If the person has upper and lower dentures, take the lower one out first.
- 3 **Rinse off loose food** under cool running water.
- 4 **Brush every surface** of the denture, especially the fitting surface that sits against the gums, using a denture brush or soft toothbrush with mild soap or a non-abrasive denture cleaner. Plaque sticks to dentures just as it does to teeth, so they need brushing.
- 5 **Clean over a bowl of water or a folded towel**, so the denture won't break if it is dropped.
- 6 **Soak in a denture-cleansing solution** after brushing, following the manufacturer's instructions (usually about 20 minutes). This helps prevent denture stomatitis and may reduce the risk of pneumonia. Check the product is suitable for dentures with metal parts.
- 7 **Rinse thoroughly** under cool running water. Put the dentures back in, or store them dry in a clean, named pot overnight (see page 3).
- 8 **Clean the mouth too.** Brush any natural teeth with fluoride toothpaste and gently clean the gums, tongue and roof of the mouth with a soft toothbrush.
- 9 **Check the mouth and the dentures** for sore areas, cracks, sharp edges or a poor fit, and report any problems.

Do

- Use mild soap and a denture brush or soft toothbrush
- Use cool or lukewarm water
- Handle dentures over water or a towel
- Store dentures dry overnight in a clean, named pot
- Check dentures are marked with the person's name

Don't

- Use toothpaste: it is abrasive and scratches dentures
- Use very hot water: it can weaken and distort dentures
- Use any bleach or bleaching product: it weakens dentures and makes them look unsightly
- Try to remove tartar yourself: ask a dentist or dental technician
- Wrap dentures in tissue or napkins: they are easily thrown away



SECTION 02

Storing dentures safely

Best practice is to remove dentures at night, clean them, and store them **dry** in a clean, named denture pot.

Remove dentures overnight

Take dentures out at night to let the gums rest. Wearing them day and night increases the risk of oral thrush. If a person prefers to keep them in at night, record this in their care plan and make sure they have a denture-free period during the day.

Clean before storing

Always clean dentures before storing them, so plaque and food aren't left on them overnight.

Use a named, lidded pot

Store dentures in the person's own denture pot with a lid, clearly labelled with their name. Never share pots.

Store dentures dry

After cleaning, store dentures DRY in the pot overnight. Leaving them dry for around 8 hours reduces *Candida* on the denture and helps prevent oral thrush.

Keep the pot clean

Empty, wash with warm soapy water, rinse and air-dry the pot every day. Replace it if it is cracked, stained or can't be cleaned properly.

Keep them safe

Keep the pot in the person's room or bathroom, in the same place every time, where it won't be knocked over or mistaken for something else.

Dry or in water? What the evidence says

Dentists used to advise storing dentures in water overnight, because it was thought they would warp if left dry. A 2020 systematic review found that:

- Storing dentures dry does **not** cause significant change to their shape or fit.
- Leaving dentures dry for around 8 hours **reduces *Candida*** on the denture, lowering the risk of denture stomatitis (oral thrush).
- Storing dentures in water alone **may encourage *Candida*** to grow.

Best practice: clean, then store DRY in a clean, named denture pot overnight.

Record it in the care plan

- Whether the person has upper, lower or both dentures, and whether they are full or partial.
- Whether the dentures are marked with the person's name.
- Where they are stored, and whether the person wears them at night.
- Any lost or damaged dentures, reported straight away so a dental appointment can be arranged.



SECTION 03

Oral thrush and dentures

Oral thrush is a fungal infection caused by Candida. It is common in people who wear dentures, especially if the dentures are worn overnight or not cleaned well. Red, sore gums under a denture are sometimes called denture stomatitis.

SIGNS TO LOOK FOR

- Creamy white patches that may wipe off, leaving red, sore areas
- Red, inflamed gums or palate under the denture
- Sore, cracked corners of the mouth
- A burning feeling, or pain when eating or drinking
- Loss of taste or an unpleasant taste
- The person refusing food or their dentures

WHO IS AT HIGHER RISK?

- People who wear dentures, particularly overnight
- Dentures that are poorly cleaned or fit badly
- A dry mouth
- Recent antibiotics
- Steroid inhalers, especially if the mouth isn't rinsed after use
- Diabetes or a weakened immune system



If you notice signs of thrush, record them and report to the nurse, GP, dentist or pharmacist so it can be assessed and treated.

Thrush can come back

Treating the mouth alone is not enough. Candida lives on the surface of the denture, so if the denture is not cleaned and disinfected at the same time, the infection is likely to return. That is why denture care is a key part of treatment.



SECTION 04

Thrush: best practice for dentures

Follow these steps alongside any treatment prescribed by the GP, dentist or pharmacist.

- 1 Leave the dentures out as much as possible** during treatment, and always overnight, stored dry in a clean, named pot.
- 2 Clean the dentures thoroughly every day** by brushing all surfaces, as on page 2.
- 3 Soak in a denture-cleansing solution after brushing.** If the dentist or pharmacist recommends a disinfectant soak, such as chlorhexidine, follow their instructions on how long to soak.
- 4 Rinse the dentures thoroughly** in cool running water, then store them dry. Drying helps reduce Candida on the denture.
- 5 Give the prescribed treatment correctly.** For example, remove dentures before using nystatin liquid. If miconazole gel is prescribed, it may be applied to the fitting surface of the denture as directed.
- 6 Keep equipment separate.** Use the person's own labelled brush and pot, wear gloves and wash your hands before and after mouth care.
- 7 Replace the toothbrush and denture brush** once treatment has finished, and clean or replace the denture pot.
- 8 Rinse the mouth with water after steroid inhalers,** or brush the teeth, if the person uses one.
- 9 Review.** If thrush does not improve or keeps coming back, ask the dentist to check the fit of the dentures and review the person's care.

MEDICINE AND PRODUCT SAFETY

- **Miconazole gel and warfarin:** miconazole can greatly increase the effect of warfarin and cause serious bleeding. Always check with the prescriber or pharmacist before it is used for anyone taking warfarin.
- **Chlorhexidine:** toothpaste can stop it working, so leave at least 30 minutes between brushing with toothpaste and using chlorhexidine. It can also stain teeth and dentures.
- **Bleach:** do not use bleach or bleaching products on dentures. They weaken the denture material.

Sources

- The effect of overnight storage conditions on complete denture colonization by *Candida albicans* and dimensional stability: a systematic review. *J Prosthet Dent* 2020;124:176–82.
- NICE Clinical Knowledge Summary: Candida – oral.
- Mouth Care Matters.
- MHRA Drug Safety Update: miconazole and warfarin.

Questions about denture care?

Our team of dental care professionals is here to help.

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