

Oral Care for Elderly and Disabled

Oral health indicates your general or overall health. If you are a caregiver of a senior citizen, you must know the importance of oral health.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) estimates that about 12 million older Americans over the age of 65 will need long-term care soon, and most will be cared for at home with friends and family as sole caregivers.

Brush to avoid decay and gum disease

[Use a soft bristle brush](#), fluoride toothpaste, and dental [floss](#) to remove the plaque that has started growing on your teeth. If the growth is not interrupted every day, it begins to destroy the outer layer of your teeth, which is the beginning of tooth decay. If ignored, the nerve inside the tooth can become infected and an abscess may form. This problem requires a root canal or pulling the tooth. In addition to the pain, the cost of repair is expensive. The teeth and gums hold food debris and bacteria which feeds the plaque formation if the plaque is not removed daily. Plaque attaches and slides under the gum line causing an infection in the gum tissue, called gingivitis. As this worsens, it attacks the bone and fibers attached to the roots of the teeth, therefore causing serious infection and loosened teeth. Gums bleed pretty easily at this stage and it's called periodontal disease. Infection from an abscess or [gum disease](#) can enter the bloodstream and cause serious health problems.

Tips for helping a disabled older adult:

When an elderly or a disabled patient cannot take care of their own mouth, oral care becomes a little more difficult. Oral hygiene tools make the job easier. If you can't handle dental floss, try the [floss holders](#). The battery operated toothbrushes help when you have trouble moving the toothbrush enough to remove plaque. If you or a loved one has trouble spitting or swallowing, use a suction machine at home. They are covered by most insurance. Ask your doctor to prescribe one, and then get a suction toothbrush to attach to the hose. It helps when caring for a patient that can't get out of bed. A suction toothbrush is especially made for long-term care as a reusable tool making it very affordable compared to the expensive disposables. It rids the mouth of very bad breath, reduces the risk of infection, and helps prevent aspiration which causes pneumonia. Avoid regular toothpaste because the foaming is hard to handle. Your dentist may recommend a fluoride treatment.

Use a non-alcoholic rinse to brush or as a rinse after brushing. Make sure it is made with [xylitol](#), which is an ingredient that stops the growth of plaque germs when left on the teeth. Look on the internet or ask your dentist about xylitol. Xylitol gum is available. Xylitol is a natural sweetener that does not cause cavities.