

Providing Daily Mouth Care for Loved Ones

It's difficult to see. Your loved one who once prided herself for her brilliant smile is now unable to care for her own mouth. Mouth disease can lead to feelings of low self-worth, poor nutrition, and mouth pain. It can exacerbate other health problems such as heart disease and diabetes. Plaque and germs in the mouth can also put older adults at risk for lung infections and even pneumonia. Your role in providing daily mouth care is very important and will greatly improve your loved one's overall health and quality of life.

Caregiver Brushing Instructions:

Create a comfortable atmosphere and use encouraging words. You may play music, or even sing!

Wear clean, disposable gloves.

Sit loved one upright or bring them to a sink. Have a towel handy and a disposable cup for potential spills.

If sitting in a chair, stand behind them and cradle their head as you do the next six steps.

1. Take a look at their lips and inside of the mouth. If you notice any cracking, lumps, white or red lesions, or sores that do not heal within 2 weeks, you should consult a dentist or doctor.
2. [Floss](#) all teeth, dental bridges, and implants.
3. Using a soft bristle toothbrush, [brush](#) each tooth with a small circular motion and gentle pressure. Angle the brush towards the gums as you brush the outside, inside, and chewing surface of each tooth. Brush for two minutes, at least twice a day. If available, electric toothbrushes are a good option.
4. Gently brush the tongue and roof of the mouth.
5. Have them rinse with water or a germ-fighting mouthwash.
6. If they are unable to rinse, ask them to spit out any excess toothpaste and debris. (Leaving a film of fluoridated toothpaste on the teeth can be beneficial.)

Clean dentures daily and remove at night.

If your loved one is resistant to your assistance, be patient. Consistency, repetition, and encouraging words will help them adjust.

After Eating:

Remove any remaining food from your loved one's mouth. Gauze or a soft cloth can be helpful to wipe away excess food. If brushing is not an option, ask them to rinse with a cup of water then spit back into the cup. Frequent sips of water throughout the day will help cleanse the mouth. Gum with xylitol is also a good option to help cleanse the mouth.

If Cleaning Problems Persist:

Ask your loved one's dentist about germ fighting rinses. The dentist may also prescribe a stronger toothpaste that contains more fluoride to prevent cavities.

Professional Dental Care:

If there are no problems, your loved one should visit the dentist for a professional cleaning and exam twice a year. Even those who wear dentures are in need of an annual dental exam.

