

# Toothbrushing Tips for Caregivers

A healthy mouth is important for everyone. If we can keep the mouth healthy, we can help to save teeth, limit toothaches and also improve the ability to eat well. Brushing is an important part of a healthy mouth which includes care for natural teeth, dentures and removable partial dentures.

## Tips for brushing an adult's teeth:

1. **Think about how and where it may be easier to brush their teeth.** Tooth brushing does not need to be done standing at a bathroom sink; it can be done just as easily at a table with a towel, bowl and cup of water. It is a matter of finding what works best for both of you. Keep it simple and comfortable. Tell, show, do and make tooth brushing part of a daily routine in a location that is comfortable.
2. **Limit the use of toothpaste or do not use toothpaste.** Toothpaste may have a fresh minty appeal and the fluoride is important, but the most critical piece of tooth brushing is the mechanical removal of soft deposits such as plaque and food. Toothpaste may have an unfavorable taste for some adults and may bother those individuals with swallowing problems. If you do use toothpaste, choose one with fluoride which can help prevent decay and a pea size amount is all you will need.
3. **Select a toothbrush that has soft bristles and is easy to hold.** Consider: a child's size toothbrush, a powered toothbrush (which has a large handle and may be easier to use), or making changes to a toothbrush depending on the ability to grasp the toothbrush handle. Changes include; wrapping the toothbrush handle in a small face cloth, Styrofoam tubing or a bicycle handle placed over the handle of the toothbrush. Replace the toothbrush as soon as it appears worn.
4. **Caregiver positioning is also important.** If the person is in a wheelchair, it may be easier to stand behind them when helping with tooth brushing. If the brushing is not done at the bathroom sink, sitting knee to knee is comfortable and will increase the ability for the caregiver to see in the mouth.
5. **Brush gently along the gum line.** Check along the folds between the teeth and the cheeks where food remains may add up. You may want to swipe this area with a gloved finger or large swab. For a person with [dentures](#) or partials, remove them before brushing the teeth.