

TOOTH BRUSHING 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 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.

Step 1: Brush Every Day

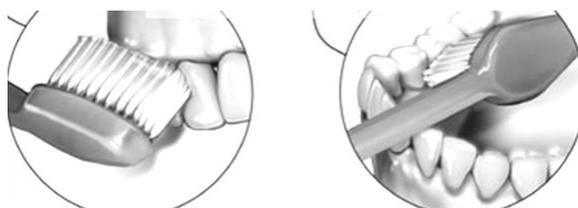
- 1) First, wash your hands and put on disposable gloves.
- 2) **Think about how and where it may be easier to brush their teeth.** Tooth brushing does not need to be done standing at a bathroom sink; it can be done just as easily at a table with a towel, bowl and cup of water. It is a matter of finding 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.

- 3) **Caregiver positioning is 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.



- 4) **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.
- 5) **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. For instance, 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 every 2-3 months.

- 6) **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.



- 7) **For a person with dentures or partials:** Always remove dentures/partial while the person is sleeping. Soak the denture or partial in a cleaner to remove any debris and keep it clean.



Step 2: Floss Every Day

Flossing cleans between the teeth where a toothbrush can't reach. Many people with disabilities need a caregiver to help them floss. Flossing is a tough job that takes a lot of practice. Waxed, unwaxed, flavored, or plain floss all do the same thing. The person you care for might like one more than another, or a certain type might be easier to use.

- Use a string of floss 18 inches long. Wrap that piece around the middle finger of each hand. Grip the floss between the thumb and index finger of each hand.
- Start with the lower front teeth, then floss the upper front teeth. Next, work your way around to all the other teeth.
- Work the floss through the teeth until it reaches the gumline. Curve the floss around each tooth and slip it under the gum. Slide the floss up and down. Do this for both sides of every tooth, one side at a time. Adjust the floss a little as you move from tooth to tooth so the floss is clean for each one.



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