

CLEANING THE MOUTH OF AN ADULT WITH A NEURO-DISABILITY



Key points

- People with a neuro-disability may require a greater level of assistance with tooth brushing and mouth care.
- Regular effective mouth care is an essential part of personal care and important for good oral health.
- Good oral care has been linked to reducing the incidence and severity of chest infections.



Having the correct tools for mouth care

- Small-headed toothbrush
- Toothpaste
- Yankauer suction for patients with swallowing difficulties

Toothbrushes

- A toothbrush used properly is the only tool that will effectively remove plaque from the teeth and mouth.
- A small-headed toothbrush is recommended to help reach all parts of the mouth.
- A small-headed soft toothbrush can be used for people with very sore mouths, or those suffering from dry mouth or ulcers. An alternative is a children's toothbrush.
- If the person can tolerate the vibrations, an electric tooth brush can be very effective for cleaning the teeth.

Toothpaste

- Ideally teeth should be brushed twice a day with a toothpaste containing between 1350 - 1500 part per million fluoride.
- Sodium lauryl sulphate (SLS) is the ingredient added to many types of toothpaste to make them foam and should be avoided in people with swallowing difficulties.
- The following table contains a list of some non-foaming SLS free toothpastes.

Brand	Fluoride Content (adults should brush twice daily with a toothpaste containing 13500-1500ppm fluoride)
Sensodyne Daily Care Gel, Sensodyne Daily Care Oranurse unflavoured toothpaste, Sensodyne Pronamel BioXtra toothpaste, Oralieve toothpaste	1450ppm
Aquafresh Children's little teeth	1400ppm
Retardex toothpaste, Biotene toothpaste	1000ppm



How to support people with mouth care

- People may require different levels of support with oral care. It may be as simple as reminding them to brush their teeth or fully supporting them.
- Promote independence where possible by getting the person to hold the toothbrush in their hand. You can gently hold and move their hand to help them brush.
- Where possible, individuals should be sat upright to reduce the risk of aspiration.
- Before you begin, talk to the person to inform them that you are going to provide mouth care.
- Gentle brushing of the lips or placing a little toothpaste on the lips can help them understand that they are going to receive mouth care and may encourage mouth opening.
- A pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste should be used for patients with no swallowing problems. After brushing they should be advised to spit but not rinse for 30 minutes to maximise the contact of fluoride on the teeth.
- For patients with swallowing difficulties it is advisable to use non-foaming toothpaste, press the bristles of a small headed toothbrush into a smear of paste so that it is less likely to fall off the brush.
- Some patients who are not orally fed may be very sensitive to the flavour of minty toothpaste. It may be worth trying non-flavoured toothpaste such as Oranurse or a children's toothpaste with a milder flavour.
- For patients with swallowing difficulties it is recommended that one person brushes the teeth whilst another person suctions the mouth to reduce the risk of aspiration. Some people find suction toothbrushes useful (brushes that can be connected to the suction unit).
- If you are concerned about carrying out tooth brushing on a patient with swallowing difficulties, then please contact a dental professional or a speech and language therapist for further advice.



What is the best way to brush teeth and gums?

Ideally teeth and gums should be brushed for two minutes in small circular motions (not backwards and forwards) clearing the debris out of the mouth. All the surfaces should be brushed and the bristles should be angled at 45 degrees towards the gums.

Brushing the gums at an angle





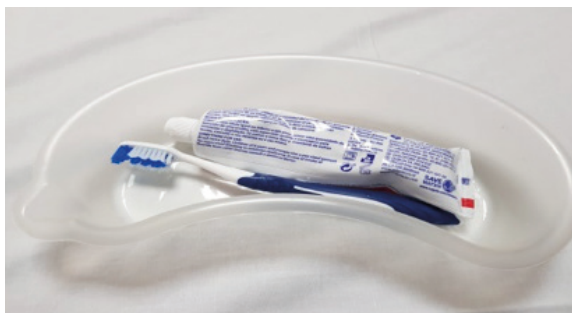
Do not forget to clean the tongue and the rest of the mouth

People with a neuro-disability often build up secretions on their tongue and palate and it is important to brush the tongue and use suction to remove secretions, brush the tongue from back to front.

Storing mouth care products

Mouth care products should be stored separately to other personal products such as razors, combs and hairbrushes to prevent cross infection.

Right ✓



Wrong ✗



Brushing teeth in people with a very strong bite reflex

Some people with a neuro-disability have a very strong bite reflex and may be resistant to mouth opening. Many of these patients are not orally fed. Mouth care is important but we need to assess the risk versus the benefits.

Never force a mouth open or put fingers between the teeth. If a patient bites down on a toothbrush or a suction tube wait for the patient to open their mouth. Don't pull on the suction tube because this risks damaging the teeth or breaking the suction tube.

There are mouth rests and finger guards available that the patient can bite on but only use these if you feel confident and have received instruction in their use.