

Helping Someone Else With Their Teeth

For families caring for a parent, spouse or patient who can no longer manage on their own.

The goal is not a perfect job. It is getting the plaque off twice a day without a fight. A short, calm brushing that actually happens beats a thorough one that ends in an argument.

Setting up

- It does not have to happen in the bathroom. Choose wherever they are most comfortable and relaxed.
- Find a position that works for *both* of you. Seated in front of them, standing behind, or off to one side all work. Comfort matters more than technique.
- Have them sit up. Put a towel across their chest.
- Gather everything first. Wash your hands or wear gloves.

The brush

- **Use a soft brush.** A children's toothbrush with soft bristles is often easier and more comfortable than an adult brush.
- Long handles or angled heads are easier to control.
- Electric brushes help some people and upset others. Try it and see.
- If brushing is refused entirely, gum and tooth wipes are better than nothing.

Doing it

- **Tell, show, do.** Say what you are about to do, show them, then do it the same way you described.
- One short instruction at a time: "hold your toothbrush," then "open."
- Hold the brush at about 45 degrees to the gums. Brush gently. Include the gums, the tongue and the roof of the mouth.
- If swallowing is difficult, skip rinsing and wipe the mouth with wet gauze or a soft cloth.
- **Twice a day**, and make the last one **after the final meal or liquid medication** of the day.
- If they are upset or refusing, stop and try again later. It is not worth the fight.

Call us if you notice: a broken or chipped tooth, a sore that has not healed in two weeks, bleeding gums, a loose or painful denture, swelling or a bad taste, or any change in what they will eat. **Trouble eating is often the first sign, and it rarely hurts first.**

And if they cannot tolerate treatment: there are options short of a filling, including medication that can arrest decay without a drill or an injection. "He will not sit for it" is the start of a conversation, not the end of one.

Between the teeth

- **Floss picks are far easier** than string floss when you are doing it for someone else.
- Interdental brushes work well too, as does a water flosser.

If they wear dentures

- Rinse with plain water after meals.
- Brush them daily with a denture brush and denture cleaner, not regular toothpaste, which is too abrasive.
- **Out at night**, stored in water or denture solution.
- Brush the gums, tongue and roof of the mouth even when no natural teeth remain.
- A denture that has become loose, or that causes a sore spot, needs looking at rather than gluing.

Dry mouth

- Most people on several medications have a dry mouth, and it drives decay quickly.
- Sips of water, no sugary drinks between meals, dry-mouth gel at bedtime.
- Avoid alcohol-based mouthwashes, which make it worse.
- Bring the full medication list to the appointment. It tells us more than an X-ray does.

Questions? Call 702-734-0776

2650 Lake Sahara Dr., #160, Las Vegas, NV 89117
Mon & Tue 7-12, 1-5 · Wed 7-12, 1-3 · Thu 7-12, 1-4

Guidance adapted from the Alzheimer's Association's caregiver dental care recommendations. We do not make hospital or care facility visits. General information, not a substitute for an exam.