

## DDD PREVENTION BULLETIN | ORAL CARE



**Oral health** is an important indicator of overall health, well-being, and quality of life. The mouth serves as an entry point into the body; therefore, poor oral hygiene can lead to other complications such as pneumonia, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and even mealtime choking risks.

### *Developmental Disabilities and Oral Health:*

Individuals with developmental disabilities such as autism, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, and other cognitive needs often experience challenges with completing daily living skills. People with these disabilities may need assistance with maintaining good health, particularly with oral care.

*Conditions that may have an impact on receiving oral care at home or in the dentist's office. Consider scheduling longer appointment times, if needed.*

**Cognition**

Understanding and following directions are impacted based on the ability to process information accurately.

**Behaviors**

Anxiety and panic, for example, can cause someone to be uncooperative or non-compliant with oral care.

**Mobility**

Using the dental chair may require special arrangements or assistance with people who utilize wheelchairs or walkers.

**Neuromuscular Structures**

Oral motor structures including low tone in cheeks and in muscles that require chewing can cause drooling, gagging, and swallowing problems.

**Uncontrolled Movements**

Involuntary body movements and spasms can affect the ability to deliver oral care safely.

**Cardiac Disorders**

Gum disease (periodontitis) is associated with an increased risk of developing heart disease. Poor oral health increases the risk of a bacterial infection in the bloodstream, which can affect the heart valves.

**Gastroesophageal Reflux**

Teeth may be sensitive or display signs of erosion from reflux of stomach acid.

**Seizures**

During a seizure, people may chip their teeth or bite their tongue.

**Visual/Impairments**

Lack of vision/sound affects sensory feedback and may cause additional stress.

**Allergies**

Consider allergies to latex gloves and medications used in oral care.



### *Signs and Symptoms of Poor Oral Health:*

- Bad Breath
- Tooth Pain
- Tooth Discoloration
- Dry Mouth
- Loss of Taste
- Root Decay
- Gum Disease
- Inflamed Gums

## Daily Oral Care:

- Visiting the dentist regularly (every 6 months) for checkups and cleanings
- Daily brushing (2-3 times per day) with fluoride toothpaste
- Daily flossing, being sure to floss between the gums as well as the teeth
- Regular brushing after eating sugary or starchy foods
- Maintaining a good diet with the least amount of sugar possible
- Drinking water and avoiding sugar-filled drinks
- Suctioning is recommended if the individual is not able to “swish and spit”
- If brushing teeth is difficult due to dexterity problems or pain caused by conditions like arthritis, try using an electric toothbrush



## Oral Care for Tube-fed Individuals

Individuals who do not eat by mouth may receive their nutrition via a gastrostomy tube (G-tube), a nasogastric tube (NG Tube), or a jejunostomy tube (J-tube). Oral care is maintained with a toothbrush or oral sponge to reduce bacteria in the saliva and gel to moisten the mouth.



## Tips for Caregivers:

If you are a caregiver for someone who needs help brushing their teeth:

- Ease the person you care for into a dental routine, and be patient as they get used to you providing care
- Whenever possible, always encourage participation in their own oral health care
- Avoid cross-contamination by wearing gloves while brushing
- Brush all parts of the mouth, including the teeth, the roof of the mouth, the sides of the mouth, the tongue, and the gums
- Don't forget to remove dentures before brushing them
- Always check to make sure you are not pressing too hard or causing pain
- Replace toothbrushes every 2-3 months or once they become frayed
- Be patient if the person you care for is not opening their mouth. Be creative and use verbal praise when they are participating

## Care for Dentures:

- Remove your dentures after every meal and rinse with water to remove food particles
- Handle your dentures with care. They are easily damaged
- Brush your dentures at least once a day (after removal)
- Use a denture-soaking solution to soak your dentures overnight.
- Rinse your dentures before putting them back into your mouth

