

The Importance of Oral Care

Why brush our teeth? 	• To keep our teeth and mouth fresh, clean and healthy. • To prevent a build-up of harmful bacteria which can cause plaque, tooth and gum disease. • For comfort.
People with swallow difficulties	• Food, drink and saliva can pool in the mouth, causing harmful bacteria to grow. • This can be swallowed the wrong way - into the lungs (known as aspiration). • Aspiration can sometimes cause a chest infection called aspiration pneumonia and can be life threatening.
Good oral care has been proven to reduce aspiration pneumonia in people with swallow difficulties	
When? 	• Minimum twice a day, morning and before bed. • Check before and after meals to ensure no food debris is left in the mouth which could potentially become harmful e.g. choking hazard or providing a breeding ground for bacteria. • You may have to clean your teeth, gums, mouth more regularly if you experience, dry mouth or excess saliva. • It is important to clean your mouth even if you have no teeth or dentures. • Make it part of your essential routine.
Who? 	• Wherever possible the person should be encouraged to brush their own teeth. • If you have difficulties using your hand and/or arm there are toothbrushes available with large handles, angled heads or a special handgrip that may be appropriate (consult your OT for support with this). • Electric toothbrushes are very effective at providing a large amount of cleaning action with very little movement needed from the user.
Equipment 	• A dry small headed soft to medium bristled toothbrush. • A small pea-sized amount of toothpaste on a dry toothbrush. • Low-foaming toothpaste is ideal.
How to do it	If the person requires assistance to perform oral care you should: • Stand or sit behind them because it helps to support their head and means your hands are in the most appropriate position to brush their teeth. • Tilt the persons head forward slightly to reduce their risk of aspirating on the toothpaste and debris brushed from their teeth. • Do not wet the toothbrush which will keep foaming to a minimum.

	• Place the head of the toothbrush against the teeth brushing all surfaces of the teeth: front, top and inside including the gums and tongue. • Do not rinse the mouth after brushing as water and debris might be aspirated. Instead remove this with a damp cloth, toothbrush or mouth cleanser. • It is also important to leave the fluoride on the teeth to help strengthen the enamel and help fight decay for longer. • If the person is unable to sit upright and they have an adjustable bed raise it to an incline and tilt the head forward and to one side. If they don't have an adjustable bed lay them on their side with their head on a pillow and a towel covering the pillow. • For people with no teeth gently brush the gums with a soft toothbrush. • If necessary and possible use an electric suction apparatus to prevent aspiration of the oral content.
Nil By  Mouth	• Hard plaque can build up more quickly and be difficult to remove. • Good tooth brushing will prevent this. • They may develop aversion or 'sensory defensiveness' to oral care. Avoid this by gradually increasing amounts of regular oral care with a soft toothbrush and mild or unflavoured toothpaste. • Suffering from dry mouth is common.
Dry  mouth	• Greater risk of dental decay and gum disease. • Very uncomfortable and also makes chewing and swallowing more difficult. • If able the person should be encouraged to take frequent sips of water. • A number of saliva substitute gels and sprays designed to provide moisture and comfort are available e.g. BioXtra or Biotene oral gels or sprays (please see additional leaflet).
Dentures 	• They should be rinsed after eating to remove any debris. • Cleaned twice a day, morning and night, all surfaces of the dentures should be brushed gently with a soft-bristled toothbrush or denture brush to remove any plaque and debris. • Dentures can be brushed with warm soapy water, a denture cleanser will help to remove stubborn stains. • When not in the mouth they should be left to soak in cold water to prevent them warping and cracking. • Dentures should be removed at night.
Training	Mouth Care Matters e-learning resources now available - elearning for healthcare (e-lfh.org.uk)