



Brushing the teeth of those with additional needs

When brushing someone else's teeth, the carer should ideally be positioned behind the person, slightly to one side or from the front. This will give better access and vision into the mouth while gently supporting the head. Approach the person at eye level and gently explain what is happening.

Good head support must be provided. It should be comfortable for carer/parent also. This might mean having the person sitting on a wheelchair, on the bed or in the case of children sitting on the lap.

We advise the same order of brushing each time. This will ensure that each area of the mouth is brushed, and not missed. If co-operation is very limited, in extreme circumstances it would be more suitable to brush a different area of the mouth each day.

For example:

- Brush the upper right-hand teeth ensuring ALL surfaces in this area are brushed thoroughly in the morning.
- Brush the lower right-hand teeth before going to bed.
- The next day's focus should be on the left-hand side of the mouth.

You may find it helpful to use a tooth-brushing chart to ensure no teeth are missed.

A thorough brush of all surfaces of the teeth (inside, outside and biting surfaces) once every two days is better than an inadequate brush every day.

It may be necessary to gently draw back the lips and cheeks with thumb, forefinger (with a gloved hand) or toothbrush to gain access to the teeth and gums. Vaseline or lip balm might make it more comfortable.

Make sure the toothbrush is in good order and a fluoride toothpaste containing at least 1450 PPM is used.

There are a range of brushes that can help people with reduced dexterity. An electric one does most of the work. A thickened handled brush, or one that is adapted (e.g. by placing a tennis ball or bicycle grip over the end) can make brushing easier. A special brush like the Collis Curve (pictured) can help a person with limited dexterity or a carer to brush the teeth.



Assisting with toothbrushing

This is an invasive process and can sometimes be uncomfortable for someone. Permission needs to be obtained and an explanation of what is going to happen.

The most important time to brush the teeth is before bedtime but it may be easier to assist brushing at a time when the person is more relaxed during the day e.g. watching television or listening to music.

Encourage the person being assisted to do as much brushing as they are capable of themselves. The toothbrush may need adapted to enable the patient to do this.



If the person bites or grinds on a toothbrush this can make brushing someone's teeth difficult. Allowing the person to 'bite' down on a large toothbrush in the opposite side to which you want to brush will 'prop' the mouth open, enabling access. This may require two people to assist.

Starting brushing at the back of the mouth first and moving forward can reduce gagging or retching.



Some people find it easier to brush their teeth and allow their teeth to be brushed when watching in the mirror.

An active tongue and/or a tight lip may push the toothbrush away from the teeth and gums so gentle retraction of the lip, cheeks and tongue may be required. This can be done using a toothbrush or fingers wrapped in a flannel. The use of hard plastic finger guard (pictured – this

one is by Dento care) can also be helpful if there is a risk of being bitten.



If teeth are loose more care is needed around these to ensure thorough cleaning.

If the person has a sensitive mouth or dislikes the taste of mint an unflavoured toothpaste like Oranurse can help. It has the daily recommended fluoride (1450 PPM) and is SLS free (non-foaming).



If the person has excess saliva and tends to suffer from drooling use fluoride toothpaste on a dry toothbrush and push the paste down into the bristles.

Gums bleed when teeth are not brushed effectively, and plaque is left on the teeth and gums. If gums are bleeding it is therefore an indication that more brushing in this area is required. Overtime bleeding will reduce if the brushing is maintained. If gums continue to bleed, see a dentist

Some medication and systemic diseases can cause a dry mouth, leaving the person more prone to gum disease and dental decay. Medications should NEVER be stopped. Ask your dentist for advice on preventive measures such as saliva substitutes.