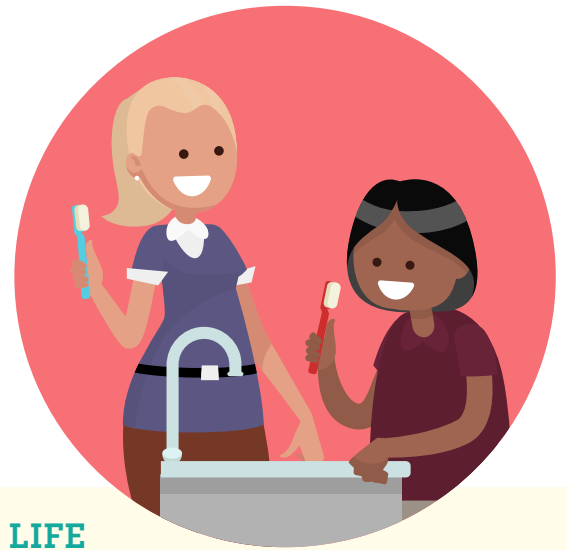


# ORAL HEALTH TIPS FOR CAREGIVERS SUPPORTING OLDER ADULTS LIVING WITH DEMENTIA AT HOME



## GOOD ORAL HEALTH IS IMPORTANT THROUGHOUT LIFE FOR OVERALL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

- Poor oral hygiene can:
  - Increase the risk of developing respiratory infections like pneumonia.
  - Make it harder to control blood-sugar levels in people with diabetes.
- Increase the risk of heart attack and stroke.
- Lower self-esteem, reduce social interactions and lower quality of life.



## ORAL HEALTH AND DEMENTIA

- Older adults with dementia have more cavities than those without dementia.
- Older adults with dementia are less likely to visit an oral health professional compared to older adults without dementia.
- Research suggests that there appears to be a link between poor oral health and dementia but the exact nature of the relationship is still unknown.

## AS DEMENTIA PROGRESSES MORE SUPPORT WILL BE NEEDED

- Oral care is a complex task with many steps.
- As dementia progresses, oral care becomes more difficult to complete and the level of support needed increases.

## SIGNS THAT MORE SUPPORT MAY BE NEEDED:

- Does the toothbrush look like it is not being used?
- Has it been a while since the tube of toothpaste or container of floss has been replaced?
- Is there ongoing bad breath?
- Does the person have difficulty chewing food?
- As not all people can express pain, are there signs of dental pain such as frowning or grimacing when chewing food or drinking hot and cold fluids?



## AS A CAREGIVER, HOW TO SUPPORT AN OLDER ADULT LIVING WITH DEMENTIA:

- Recognize that assisting or directly providing oral care to an older adult living with dementia is not an easy task and it may be uncomfortable.
- Be prepared for some resistance when assisting or directly providing oral care. Further information on tips for communicating can be found [here](#).
- Start by finding routines that are familiar to the older adult living with dementia and identify routines you are both comfortable with—such as brushing teeth together, in the same place and at the same time of day.
- As dementia progresses, some individuals may have trouble identifying their oral care tools. Consider labeling them in a way that is easy to identify (e.g., name, colors, placing dental tools and supplies in familiar places).
- Be prepared to provide reminders and prompts to help orient the older adult living with dementia that it is time to complete their oral care.
- More tips for caregivers can be found at:
  - [Canadian Dental Association: Tips for Caregivers](#)
  - [Canadian Dental Hygienists Association: Advice for Caregivers](#)



## PARTNERING WITH AN ORAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL

- Try to book appointments with an oral health professional who is familiar to the older adult living with dementia, especially in the later stages of the condition.
- Inform the oral health professional of a dementia diagnosis, even in the early stages, so that informed and appropriate treatment decisions can be made.
- Work with the oral health professional to identify strategies that can help you to better provide support and care at home.