

How to Talk About Your Loved One's Oral Health*



Maine's Oral Team-Based Initiative:
Vital Access to Education

As a care partner, it is important to speak with primary care providers (PCPs) about your loved one's oral health. Read below for tips on what questions to ask and what information to share.



What is a PCP?

A PCP is someone who takes care of the whole person. They provide a range of health care services. This includes preventative services like screening and immunizations. They also coordinate care and help you access specialized services or providers, if needed. A PCP may be a:

- ✓ Physician – MD or Medical Doctor, DO or Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine
- ✓ Nurse practitioner
- ✓ Clinical nurse specialist
- ✓ Physician assistant

Why Talk to PCPs?

A PCP works with the individual, the caregiver and your loved one's specialists to keep them as healthy as possible. Overall health includes good oral health as well. In addition, medical conditions can be affected by oral health, and conversely, treatments for certain conditions can affect oral health.

People do not usually discuss oral health during primary care appointments. However, many people have limited access to dental care. As a result, there are missed opportunities for PCPs to help. That's why any visit to a PCP should include a discussion about your loved one's oral health.

Oral Health Concerns

Let PCPs know when the person's last dental exam was and share any concerns you have about their oral health. Share the name of your loved one's PCP and dentist with each provider.

- ✓ Symptoms of oral dryness
- ✓ Pain or bleeding in the mouth
- ✓ A spot in their mouth, lip, or throat that feels uncomfortable or sore
- ✓ A lump or thick area in their mouth, lip, or throat
- ✓ A white or red patch in their mouth
- ✓ Trouble chewing, swallowing, or moving their jaw or tongue
- ✓ Numbness in the tongue or mouth
- ✓ Jaw swelling
- ✓ Oral hygiene and dietary habits
- ✓ If the person smokes or drinks alcohol
- ✓ Foul smelling mouth odor
- ✓ Weight loss
- ✓ Decreased appetite

Oral Health Recommendations

After an exam, the PCP may offer suggestions or treatments such as:

- ✓ Medication changes to help with dry mouth
- ✓ Fluoride therapy
- ✓ Dietary counseling
- ✓ Oral hygiene training
- ✓ Therapy for substance use (tobacco, alcohol, etc.)
- ✓ Suggestions on where to receive affordable dental care



Find more
information on
good oral health

MOTIVATE at Home is a free program that increases your knowledge of oral health care. Any person who is a caregiver or care partner of an older adult in Maine can be part of this new program.

Learn more at <https://lunderdineen.org/MOTIVATE>

*Oral health includes many things: the condition of the mouth, teeth, gums, and one's ability to smile, speak, eat, breathe and chew. (WHO)
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