



Improving Oral Health for Adults in Nursing Homes

Oral health is connected to our overall health. Good oral care is important for older adults who have unique health needs. This tip sheet is designed to help health care teams in nursing homes learn how to improve the oral health care provided to their residents.

Have Your Toolkit Ready

When you're planning to provide oral care to a resident, it's important to have all of your supplies ready.

- ✔ **Toothbrush** - Use a soft brush and allow the brush to dry each day
- ✔ **Toothpaste** - Use fluoride toothpaste with the ADA Seal of Acceptance
- ✔ **Dental floss** - String or floss picks are the most available options
- ✔ **Facial mask** - Cover your nose and mouth to prevent the spread of germs
- ✔ **Gloves** - Avoid latex gloves due to the potential for allergic reaction



Go Slowly and Explain Each Step Clearly

- ✔ Schedule a specific time to be with the resident and develop a routine for oral care.
- ✔ As much as they are able, coach the residents to do as much of the cleaning as possible.
- ✔ As you brush and floss, be sure to tell the resident what you're doing with each step and what they can expect.
- ✔ Clean a few teeth then allow the resident to rest. Let them set the speed of the visit.

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Floss and Brush Gently

Brush at the gum line at a 45 degree angle with the brush half on the gums and half on the teeth. If residents are unwilling or begin to resist, evaluate the nature of the problem and re-approach later.



Caring for Dentures and Partial

- ✓ Encourage residents to do as much of the cleaning as possible.
- ✓ Handle the dentures or partials carefully. To avoid breaking, clean over a folded towel or sink full of water.
- ✓ Brush and rinse daily with a soft-bristle brush.
- ✓ Use denture cleaning products with the ADA Seal of Acceptance. Avoid cleaning them with bleach or toothpaste.
- ✓ Soak in a denture cleaner overnight as directed.
- ✓ Always rinse the dentures or partials before putting them back in the resident's mouth.

Did You Know?

36%

of adults 65 and older have not had a dental visit in the past year.¹

19.5%

of adults age 75 and older have untreated tooth decay.²



Tobacco use and diabetes put individuals at higher risk for gum disease.³

Older adults with diabetes or heart disease are less likely to have had a dental exam in the last year, as compared to older adults without diabetes or heart disease.¹

Older adults with a bachelor's degree or higher are more likely (82%) to have had a dental exam in the past year as compared to older adults with a high school education (33.3%).¹



MOTIVATE provides education and best practices to improve oral health for Maine's nursing home residents.

Learn more at lunderdineen.org/motivate