

Safety Considerations for Brushing Another Person's Teeth

When brushing someone else's teeth, it is important to keep safety in mind and adjust to the person's needs.

Where and How to Stand While Brushing :

1. Approach the person from the front.
2. Make eye contact and explain what you are going to do in simple, easy-to-understand language.
3. Before brushing, check the mouth for sores, redness, or other changes. Talk to your care team if changes last more than 2-4 weeks.
4. Stand behind and slightly to the side of the person (at the 11 or 1 o'clock position) to gently support and control the head.



Follow your work guidelines on wearing gloves.

When Risk of Biting is High

Some people (i.e., individuals living with dementia) may clench their teeth or bite during oral hygiene (practice of keeping the mouth healthy) tasks, like brushing.

Tips:

- Keep a regular time and place for daily oral hygiene
- Approach slowly and show what you are going to do
- Provide care in short sessions
- Keep the area calm and quiet
- Try to do daily oral hygiene when the person is calm
- Use tools that are easy to see, hold, and use, and are familiar to older adults'
- Give the person extra time to respond and understand
- Avoid using toothettes

If the person bites you during oral hygiene tasks, stay calm and gently move the toothbrush to the side of the mouth to release the bite.

If the person clenches their teeth, do not force the mouth open. Try again when the person is more relaxed.

See the [**Oral Care Strategies: Supporting People Living with Dementia**](#) information sheet for more details.

Helping People Who Have Difficulty Swallowing

Dysphagia (difficulty swallowing) is common in older adults.

Tips:

- Brush at least twice a day. A healthcare professional may suggest brushing more often or at certain times to lower the risks from aspirating (food/liquid going into the lungs).
- Have the person sit up straight, lower their chin a little bit, and cover their chest with a towel.

Changes to Toothbrushing:

- Use a small amount of water
- Use a rice-sized amount of toothpaste.
- Use a suction tooth brush, if available.

