

Dementia & Oral Care:

Providing Care for Someone Who is Dependent

People living with dementia are at risk for poor oral health. They may need different levels of help with their daily oral hygiene (practice of keeping the mouth healthy, e.g., brushing).

Why is Oral Health Important?

Taking care of the mouth is important for comfort and overall health. Poor daily oral hygiene can cause gum disease, trouble with chewing, and poor nutrition (not eating enough).

People Living With Dementia May Have Poorer Oral Health Due To:

- Changes in **physical abilities**, such as not being able to hold a toothbrush.
- Changes in **thinking and remembering**, such as forgetting the steps to brushing teeth.
- Seeing oral care as scary or painful. This can lead to refusal or responsive behaviours.
- Difficulty telling others about or knowing they have pain.

Oral Hygiene Tips:

1. **Consistency:** Keep a regular time and place for daily oral hygiene.
2. **Explain:** Approach from the front. Then tell and show what you are going to do using simple instructions.
3. **Calm Environment:** Keep the area calm and quiet.
4. **Good Timing:** Try doing daily oral hygiene after a meal or when the person is calm.
5. **Guided Start:** Start the task (e.g. brushing). Let them help as they are able.
6. **Familiarity:** Use tools that are easy to see, hold, and use.
7. **Positioning:** Such as seated up straight in a chair.
8. **Allow Extra Time:** Be ready to take however long is needed for oral hygiene. Tasks often take more time as the disease gets worse.
9. **Pause if Needed:** It is fine to stop and try again later.

If you feel you do not have what you need to care for someone, ask for help from your care team.

Follow your work rules on glove use.



Always encourage a person living with dementia to do as much of their oral hygiene as they can on their own.

Older adults living in long-term care should have cleanings done by an oral health professional in addition to daily oral hygiene.



See also the [Oral Care Strategies: Supporting People Living with Dementia](#) information sheet for more specific ways to assist someone with daily oral hygiene.

