

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

Standing in the right position while brushing someone's teeth helps keep everyone safe and comfortable.

Tips :

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 using any oral hygiene tool, check the mouth for sores, redness, or other changes. Talk to your care team if changes last for 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 rules on wearing gloves.

When Risk of Biting is High

Some people (i.e., individuals living with dementia) may clench their teeth or try to bite during oral hygiene (practice of keeping the mouth healthy) tasks, like brushing. This could be because they feel uncomfortable, confused, or do not understand what is happening.

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 is clenching their teeth, do not try to force their mouth open. Try again when they are more relaxed.

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



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Helping People Who Have Difficulty Swallowing

Dysphagia (difficulty swallowing) is common in older adults, especially in those with certain health conditions, like stroke. Providing good daily oral hygiene to people with dysphagia is important because it helps lower the risk of getting sick from aspirating (food/liquid going into the lungs).

Tips:

- Brush at least twice a day. A healthcare professional may suggest brushing more often or at certain times to lower the risk of getting sick from aspirating.
- When brushing, have the person sit up straight, lower their chin a little bit, and cover their chest with a towel.



Changes to Toothbrushing:

Use only a rice-sized amount of toothpaste and a small amount of water on the toothbrush.



Use a suction toothbrush, if available. Please refer to our **Adaptive Aids for Oral Care** information sheet for more information.

