

General Information Sheet

Oral Hygiene For People with Swallowing Difficulty/Dysphagia

For people diagnosed with a swallowing disorder, oral hygiene will need special attention. A specific plan must be developed with the dentist or primary care physician that includes steps to complete oral hygiene as well as safeguards because of the individual's specific swallowing difficulty.

Even if a person takes nothing by mouth (receives all nutrition/liquids from a feeding tube), or has no teeth (edentulous), oral hygiene is still an important part of ensuring good health.

Some general guidelines include:

- *Use the least amount of water as possible.*
 - Whatever you are using to clean the mouth (washcloth, toothette sponge, or toothbrush) squeeze until it is almost dry.

- *Watch how you position the person for care.*
 - Leaning someone back could allow even a small amount of fluid to get into the lungs.
 - Improper position may cause gagging and choking.
 - Care should be given at face level (you are face to face with the person).

- *Having oral hygiene completed by a caregiver may be difficult for the person receiving care.*
 - Please be patient with the person.

- *Develop an oral hygiene plan with the dentist or primary care physician.*
 - Make sure that the plan includes what products to use, positioning, and frequency of care.
 - This plan should be discussed with the dentist/primary care physician if it is not working and changes made; it should be updated annually.