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.