

Brushing the Teeth of Others

A Daily Routine for Caregivers



Daily Preparation:

Brush twice a day (after breakfast and especially before bed)

- Gather all supplies before starting:
 - Toothbrush (soft or adaptive)
 - Toothpaste (pea-sized amount with fluoride)
 - Gloves
 - Towel and washcloth
 - Cup or bowl for spitting
 - Special tools (mouth rest, flossers, suction toothbrush if needed)
- Wash hands and put on gloves
- Choose a calm, well-lit space (bathroom, chair, bed, etc.)
- Lay a towel across the person's chest
- Explain what you're about to do in simple, calming words
- Use a penlight to check for sores, food, or anything unusual
 - Avoid shining light in their eyes
 - Report any concerns to a nurse or supervisor

Brushing & Flossing:

- Use a consistent routine each time (same place, pattern, voice)
- Support independence when possible (hand-over-hand or verbal prompts)
- Use small, gentle circles to clean all sides of every tooth
- Brush the tongue gently
- Count to 5 per tooth or use a timer or short song (2–3 minutes total)
- Use a calm, reassuring tone throughout
- If they resist:
 - Offer choices ('Which toothbrush?' 'Top or bottom first?')
 - Change position (side, behind)
 - Use a mirror, distraction, or calming music
 - Praise cooperation and try again later if needed
- If flossing is part of the routine
 - Use string floss (18") or floss picks
 - Gently curve floss around each tooth
 - Ask if they're okay, give breaks as needed

Tips for Sensitivities:

- Start with front teeth, lean the person slightly forward
- Use a child-size toothbrush and small rice-sized amount of toothpaste
- Use dry brushing or water only if needed at first
- Try a foam mouth rest for safety
- Consider electric toothbrush if tolerated

After Brushing:

- Ask the person to spit (use a swab if they can't)
- Don't rinse—leave a thin layer of toothpaste on teeth
- Wipe mouth gently with a damp cloth

Denture Care:

- Remove dentures gently
- Clean them over a towel to protect from breakage
- Use soft brush and denture-safe cleanser
- Soak overnight in plain water or cleanser (never bleach, peroxide, dishwasher, microwave)
- Clean gums, tongue, and cheeks daily, even without natural teeth

Care Notes:

Record anything unusual and communicate with nursing staff or dentist, when needed.

- Red, swollen, or bleeding gums.
- White patches, sores, or growths that don't heal.
- Cracked lips or corners of the mouth.
- Refusal to eat or drink.
- Loose teeth or dentures that don't fit.
- Facial swelling or pain.

**Even brushing a few teeth is better than none.
Be patient, stay calm, and keep trying.
Your care protects their health and builds trust—
one smile at a time.**