

Oral Hygiene

Oral hygiene includes brushing the teeth and cleaning the mouth. When people are alert and capable they can practice good oral care themselves. But when someone is physically unable or unconscious, caregivers must assist with those tasks. Most dentists recommend a soft bristled toothbrush with toothpaste.

Reducing Dental Disease and Injury:

- Brush as soon as possible after each meal
- Hold the brush at a 45-degree angle to the teeth
- Brush the front and back of all teeth from the gum line toward the crown of the teeth, using a circular motion
- Brush back and forth over the chewing surfaces of the molars
- Rinse the mouth during brushing to flush out loosened particles
- Use a tartar control toothpaste or rinse containing fluoride
- If brushing is not possible, rinse mouth with water after eating

Dentures

It is very important to ensure that when someone wears dentures they be cleaned as part of good oral hygiene. If your loved one cannot remove his/her own dentures, put on a glove, or use a piece of dry gauze to remove the denture from the mouth. Clean the dentures with a toothbrush, toothpaste, and cold or room temperature water. Be sure to hold the dentures over a towel or plastic bowl so they will not break if dropped. It is recommended that dentures remain in place except when they are being cleaned.

Oral Hygiene for Someone Who is Unconscious

Oral hygiene should not be neglected because your loved one is unconscious. When someone is unconscious he/she is not salivating in response to sights, smells, and eating. Oral care is needed even more frequently. Tooth brushing is the preferred route of oral care for the unconscious. However, when someone is not alert, there is a high risk for aspirating the liquid into the lungs and forming pneumonia. This is the time to use oral swabs for proper oral hygiene. If you have specific questions about your loved one's oral care, please contact his/her dentist.