

# Effective mouth care

Adult Speech and Language Therapy Department

**Information for patients**



# What is mouth care?

**Mouth care is cleaning your teeth, gums and tongue effectively, keeping the mouth healthy and free from infection and keeping the mouth clean and moist.**

**An unclean mouth can:**

- Increase the risk of a chest infection, especially if you have swallowing problems.
- Affect self-esteem, quality of life and general wellbeing.
- Reduce the sense of taste and affect a person's desire to eat.
- Increase the risk of other diseases occurring in the body such as diabetes, stroke and heart disease.

Saliva plays an important part in keeping the mouth moist and protecting it from bacteria. Saliva from an unclean mouth can go into the lungs and lead to a chest infection, particularly if you have a swallowing problem. A build-up of bacteria in the mouth may also result in tooth decay and gum disease. This can cause discomfort and can lead to infections, mouth ulcers and problems eating and speaking.

Dry mouths and lips can result from not eating or drinking for a while, from using oxygen, or can be caused by some medications, so, it is important to ensure mouths remain clean and moist.

# What do you need to do?

- Use a small-headed toothbrush. If possible use sodium laurylsulphate (SLS) free toothpaste. This is a non-foaming toothpaste.
- Place a small amount of toothpaste on the brush. There will not be any foam if the toothpaste is SLS free.

## What do you need to do? (continued)

- Use a gentle circular motion on the outside and inside of teeth and gums.
- Brush the tongue to remove bacteria and freshen breath.
- Some people with restricted movements or confusion/memory problems may need help to brush their teeth.
- Individuals who are not eating or drinking may require a nurse to provide suctioning at the time of mouth care to prevent fluids going onto the chest.
- No need to rinse – leave the toothpaste to penetrate the teeth.
- A special mouth gel can be also used to help keep the mouth moist and free from infection.
- Rinse the toothbrush in water and always leave it to air dry.

**It is also important to clean dentures – do NOT use Sterident, only use toothpaste and brush and rinse after with water.**

## How often should you carry out mouth care?

People who are eating and drinking normally should clean their teeth twice a day, allowing at least a 30 minute gap before or after eating/drinking. Individuals who have mouths that are infected or that are in a poor condition may need intensive mouth care (4 times a day or more). Those who are not eating or drinking, or are having oxygen, need to have mouth care every 2-3 hours as their mouths can become dry.

## Oral health and other conditions

We know that there is a risk of developing a chest infection or mouth infection if our mouths are not kept clean and moist. However, there is also a link between the condition of the mouth and heart disease, stroke, diabetes and smoking; so it is especially important to keep your teeth and mouth clean if you have any of these conditions.

## The bottom line on oral health

One thing is clear; the body and mouth are not separate - your body can affect your mouth and vice-versa. Taking good care of your teeth and gums can really help to improve your overall health. This means brushing twice a day, flossing once a day, and going for regular dental cleaning and check-ups.

## Speech & Language Therapy Department

King's Mill Hospital, telephone 01623 622515, extension 3320.

You have been referred to:

### Further sources of information

NHS Choices: [www.nhs.uk/conditions](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions)

Our website: [www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk](http://www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk)

### Patient Experience Team (PET)

PET is available to help with any of your compliments, concerns or complaints, and will ensure a prompt and efficient service.

**King's Mill Hospital:** 01623 672222

**Newark Hospital:** 01636 685692

**Email:** [sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net](mailto:sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net)

If you would like this information in an alternative format, for example large print or easy read, or if you need help with communicating with us, for example because you use British Sign Language, please let us know. You can call the Patient Experience Team on 01623 672222 or email [sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net](mailto:sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net).

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