

Daily Care: Basics

Caregivers play an important role in the daily oral hygiene of the people they support. As a caregiver, you may be completing all the steps of a mouth care session for a person, teaching the steps to someone or observing as someone completes daily mouth care independently.

A daily mouth care plan will help you keep track of their goals and how they are reaching them (see [Making a Daily Mouth Care Action Plan](#)). If you have concerns that are not addressed here, check with a professional, such as the dental team or an occupational therapist.



Selecting a Toothbrush

The safest toothbrush option is a regular, soft-bristle toothbrush. Medium or hard bristles can damage teeth and gums and don't reach into spaces between the teeth. Toothbrushes come in different sizes to fit different mouth sizes. Depending on the needs of the person you support, you may need to modify their toothbrush (see [Adaptations and Positions](#)). For some individuals, an electric toothbrush or a double-sided toothbrush may be the best option.

Always replace toothbrushes or toothbrush heads every three months or when bristles are bent or frayed.



Floss Alternatives

Dental professionals recommend floss, floss brushes or floss picks to clean between teeth for better oral health. The person you support may also prefer to use a water flosser.

Daily Care Steps

1. Wash hands or use hand sanitizer.
2. If you are a professional caregiver, put on disposable gloves before touching dental hygiene items.
3. Gather supplies: toothbrush, fluoride toothpaste, flossing item(s) and water.
4. Remove partial or full dentures. Clean dentures following [denture care steps](#) (two times daily).
5. Check mouth for sores, bumps, swollen gums or thick, stringy saliva. Report these to your supervisor or dental professional.
6. Brush teeth following [toothbrushing steps](#) (two times daily).
7. For individuals with no teeth, clean their mouth with a wet toothbrush or tooth sponge (two times daily).
8. Clean between teeth (one time daily).
9. To use traditional floss or a floss pick, gently press floss between each tooth using a back-and-forth motion. Form a "C" shape around each tooth with the floss. Gently slide the floss up and down the sides of each tooth.



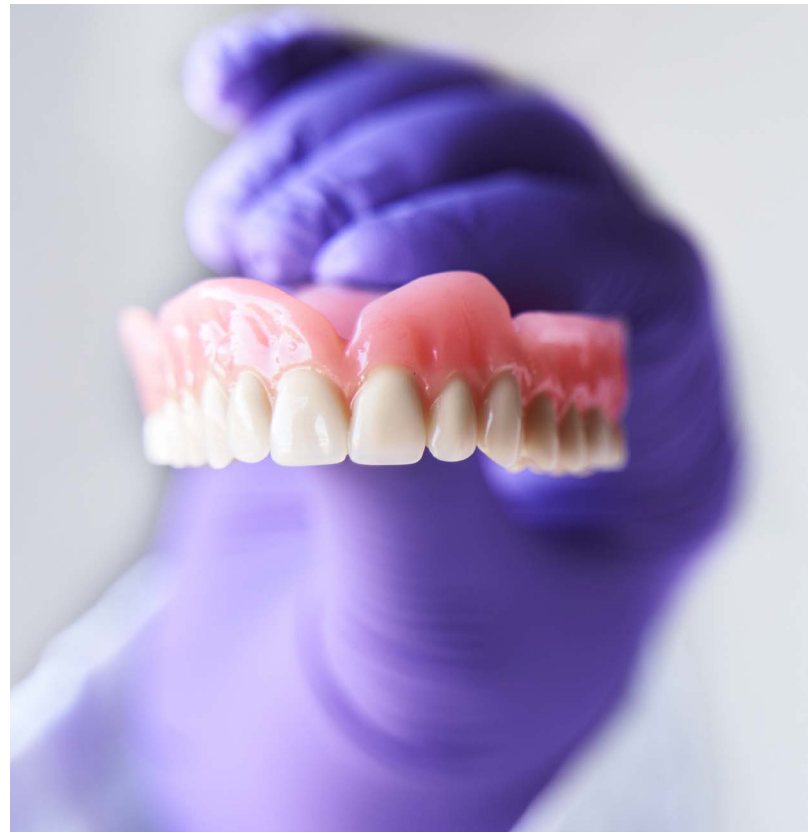
Denture or Removable Dental Appliance Care Steps

Use these steps to care for full dentures, partial dentures, retainers, Invisalign or other similar appliances.

1. Clean dentures with a denture brush or soft toothbrush and denture powder or a non-abrasive cleaner such as baking soda or mild dish soap. Do not use toothpaste, which can scratch dentures.
2. Rinse dentures thoroughly.
3. Soak dentures overnight in a denture-cleaning solution. Check with the manufacturer and dentist about properly storing dentures.
4. Clean gums with a wet toothbrush or tooth sponge.

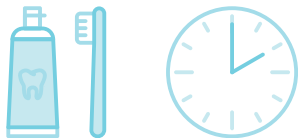
Ask the Dental Team

At a dental visit, ask how you are doing with toothbrushing and flossing.



Toothbrushing Steps

1. Wet toothbrush with warm water.
2. Place a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste on toothbrush.
3. Use **retraction** to get a better view of the teeth and gums.
4. Place the toothbrush bristles half on the teeth and half on the gums.
5. **Gently** brush in small circular motions, brushing all surfaces of all the teeth.
6. Brush gently and slowly for two minutes.
7. Thoroughly spit out toothpaste, but do not rinse mouth with water after brushing.



Retraction

Gently pulling back the cheek or lips to get a better view of the teeth and gums. Retraction allows you to look for issues such as swelling or decay and to clean teeth without damaging mouth tissues.

1. Use a gloved finger or plastic spoon (never metal) to gently pull the cheek away just enough to see the teeth and gums.
2. Ask the person you support to open their mouth halfway.
3. Brush all surfaces of all sides of the teeth.
4. Remove the toothbrush and gently release the cheek.
5. Repeat these steps on the other side of the mouth.
6. For front teeth, gently grip and pull the lip away from the teeth and gums while you brush.

Storing a Toothbrush

Toothbrushes and other personal oral care items should be stored in a container to limit the spread of bacteria. This container should close to protect the toothbrush but should also have air holes to let the toothbrush air-dry. If needed, the container can be labeled with the name of the owner.



Nutrition

Nutrition plays an important role in oral health. Take time to talk with the person you support about how food and beverages affect the health of their mouth and teeth. Daily mouth care sessions remove **plaque** and interrupt the acid-production cycle (see [Decay & Nutrition](#) for more information).

Drinking enough water will help prevent dry mouth from dehydration.

To protect teeth from being damaged overnight, complete the final mouth care session after the person you support is done eating for the day. After this session, it is still safe for them to drink water.



Plaque

A sticky substance that builds up on your teeth throughout the day. It has bacteria, saliva and residue from food and drink.

Motivational Interviewing: Daily Care Basics

Better Conversations, Better Oral Health

Use these motivational interviewing (MI) strategies to talk about oral health with the person you support.



MI Strategy for the Person You Support

Use affirmations to encourage the person you support during daily mouth care.

Example:

“You marked off every day on your brushing chart this week. That’s awesome! Think you can do it again next week?”



MI Strategy for Guardian or Family Member

Use open-ended questions to get helpful ideas from family members for the person you support.

Example:

“What have you tried in the past that worked for [person you support]?”



Adapting MI Strategies

Remember to use specific language.

Next Steps

These are additional resources that will help you and the person you support keep thinking about this topic after your conversation is over:

- [Social Stories Book: Steps to Cleaning Teeth Handout](#)
- [Product Suggestions](#)
- [Daily Care Basics Video](#)

