

# Adaptations & Positions

Caregivers of adults with disabilities should be familiar with ways to adapt daily mouth care sessions. If possible, talk with an occupational therapist about the right modifications for the person you support.

If you have other concerns that are not directly addressed here, check with a professional such as the dental team or an occupational therapist.

## Adaptations can include:

- [Adapting toothbrushes.](#)
- [Adapting positions.](#)
- [Adapting environments.](#)
- [Choosing the right oral health products.](#)



## Adapting Toothbrushes

Toothbrushes can be modified to make them easier to hold and manipulate.

- Secure toothbrush to hand using:
  - Rubber bands.
  - Hair tie.
  - Elastic bands.
- Enlarge toothbrush handle using:
  - Sponges.
  - Rubber ball such as a tennis ball.
  - Bicycle handle grip.
- Lengthen toothbrush handle using:
  - Ruler.
  - Wooden tongue depressor.
- Create an angled toothbrush handle:
  - Heat toothbrush handle in hot water and gently bend.
- Use a smaller toothbrush.



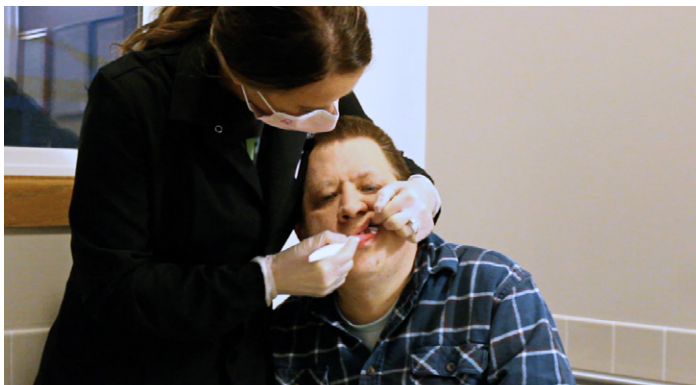
## Adapting Positions

When cleaning someone else's teeth, you want to choose a position where you can see and access the teeth. You also want to be sure their head is supported. If you are a professional caregiver, always follow company policies or talk to a supervisor about your options.

Before starting, gather all daily mouth care supplies. If you are not near a sink, set out a cup for the person you support to spit into. For more, see [Daily Care: Basics](#).

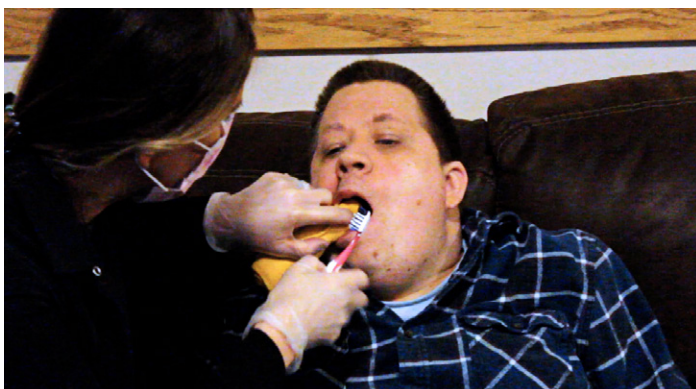
### Mouth Rest

A specially designed tool made from rubber, silicone or hard foam that is placed between teeth to hold the mouth open during mouth care sessions.



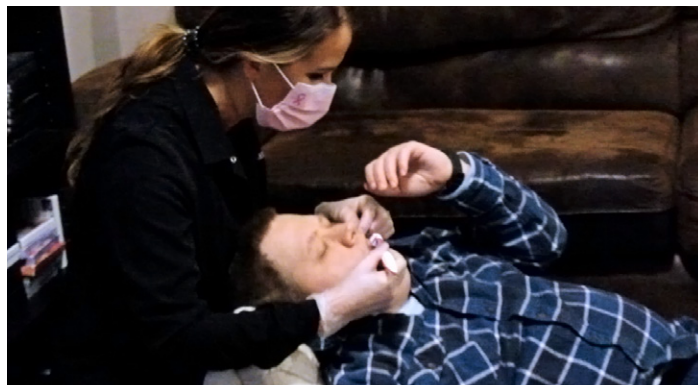
### Seated

The person you support can sit in a chair or remain in their wheelchair if they use one. Make sure wheelchair wheels are locked. Stand next to and slightly in front of the person.



### Using a Mouth Rest

To use a mouth rest, place it on one side of the mouth while you brush and floss the other side of the mouth, then switch sides. Remove the mouth rest at least once every 60 seconds to allow the person you support to rest their jaw and to swallow (see [Product Suggestions](#)).



### Reclined

**Option 1:** Sit on the couch while the person you support sits on the floor in front of you. They will lean their head back against your knees.

**Option 2:** Sit on the floor with a pillow in your lap. The person you support can recline on a cushion or beanbag, resting their head on your lap.

**Option 3:** Kneel on the floor with a pillow on your knees. The person you support lies on the floor, reclining against the pillow with their head in your lap.



### Lying Down

Sit on the couch or bed. The person you support lies down with their head on a pillow in your lap.



# Motivational Interviewing: Adaptations & Positions

## 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 reflective listening to help the person you support to identify their emotions and organize their thoughts.

#### Example:

**Person you support:** “I can’t brush my teeth right now!”

**You:** “The evening has been busy. You seem stressed. Do you want to relax now and brush your teeth later?”

Use open-ended questions to learn how the person you support felt about an adaptation or position.

#### Example:

“You sat on the floor while I brushed your teeth. How could we make that better?”

## 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:

- [Adaptations, Positions & Behavior Support Handout](#)
- [Product Suggestions](#)
- [Adaptations & Positions](#)
- [Scenario: Lying Down](#)
- [Scenario: Seated](#)
- [Scenario: Reclined](#)



### MI Strategy for Guardian or Family Member

Use reflective listening to paraphrase what a family member shares.

#### Example:

**Family member:** “[Person you support] has been brushing her own teeth since she was a kid. I’m not sure why suddenly you think someone needs to help her.”

**You:** “You’re wondering why we are suggesting [person you support] needs help brushing since she’s always done it independently. Let’s talk more about why [person you support]’s needs have changed.”



### Adapting MI Strategies

Remember to allow extra time for a response.

