Taking Care of Your Oral Health:
How to Keep Your Teeth and Mouth Healthy

A guide for individuals with intellectual and learning disabilities and their carers

Introduction to oral health

Oral health is the ability to...

- Speak
- Communicate
- Chew
- Convey emotions with facial expressions

...without pain or discomfort

It is linked with...

- Good overall health
- Dignity
- Self-esteem
- Social integration
- General nutrition and food digestion

...and contributes to a good quality of life for the individual

Which oral health conditions can you experience?

- Gum disease
- Dental trauma
- Tooth decay
- Dental crowding
- Missing teeth
- Grinding
- Gum bleeding
- Tooth fracture
- Tooth erosion
- Dental infection
- Dental developmental anomalies (enamel hypoplasia, ectopic/delayed eruption)

Which factors can impact your oral health?

Often, you can find yourself at risk of acquiring these oral health conditions due to:

**Personal factors**

- Poor oral care
- Inability to rinse or spit out
- Hypersensitive mouth
- Choking or gagging while brushing

**Systemic factors**

- Frequently eating sweet food
- Difficulty in chewing and swallowing
- Inability to perform regular mouth care
- Fear and anxiety
- Dry mouth caused by regular medication

Visit [https://oralhealth.knowledgehub.wiley.com/special-healthcare-needs/](https://oralhealth.knowledgehub.wiley.com/special-healthcare-needs/) for additional resources
How can oral diseases impact your well-being?2,4,5

Low self-esteem and stress

Risk of developing conditions like aspiration pneumonia, diabetes, respiratory diseases, or stroke

Impaired eating, speaking, swallowing, and socialising

Reduced nutritional intake

Pain and discomfort

Costly care for progressive conditions

Sleep disturbances

Difficulty in going about daily life

Improving oral health can prevent these issues from impacting your overall health and quality of life

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How can you improve your oral health?3

By seeking comprehensive oral care, which includes timely preventive and therapeutic advice to reduce the risk of developing oral disease.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preventive home care</th>
<th>Therapeutic care</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Twice daily toothbrushing with fluoride toothpaste</td>
<td>- Regular dental care</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Healthy low-sugar diet</td>
<td>- Access to specialised dental care</td>
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<td>- Regular dental visits and follow-ups</td>
<td>- when needed</td>
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<td>- Periodic professional oral hygiene</td>
<td>- Restorative care rather than</td>
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Following an oral hygiene regime1,4,6

- Poor oral hygiene leads to the build-up of dental plaque.
- Plaque is known to be the cause of dental diseases like caries and gum disease.
- Regularly removing plaque can prevent the risk of developing these conditions.
- Brushing teeth daily can help in effectively removing plaque.

A guide to oral care routine1-4,6-9

- Brush your teeth at least twice daily.
- Schedule brushing once at night (before going to bed) and at one other time during the day.
- Use a ‘correct-sized’ amount of toothpaste (rice-size from 6 months to 2 years, pea-size from 2 years to 6 years, 1–2 cm after 6 years).
- Spit out after brushing.

Make self-oral care easy!
Many new toothbrushes, pastes, and interdental cleaning aids are available to ease your self-care routine!

Choosing the right toothbrush

Power toothbrush

- Easy to use
- Safe
- Can help in tongue cleaning as well
- More effective at plaque removal than a manual toothbrush

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A healthy oral environment is directly associated with overall health and the quality of life one experiences. Controlling the build-up of dental plaque is known to prevent the occurrence of serious dental conditions. This can be effectively achieved with good oral hygiene practices and appropriate dietary and lifestyle modifications.

**Key takeaways**

- The key to good oral hygiene is in following a daily brushing routine, using easy-to-use and effective cleaning aids regularly.
- Limiting the intake of sugary foods and drinking plenty of water can supplement the oral care regime.
- Visit your healthcare provider regularly to seek dental advice and stay updated with oral hygiene knowledge.

**Dietary and lifestyle modifications for good oral health**

- Adopt a low-sugar diet
- Rinse your mouth with water after taking any medicine
- Avoid eating sugary foods more than four times per day
- Drink water rather than sugary drinks
- Limit sugar to meal times
- Increase frequency of brushing if taking a high-calorie or carbohydrate-rich diet

**Interdental (between teeth) brush**
- Can remove plaque
- Easily accesses the far-off surfaces
- Carries the head of the brush at right angles

**Three-headed toothbrush**
- Has a narrow head and limited bristles
- Can reduce “gagging reflex” when cleaning back teeth
- Can be placed inside the mouth

**Customised brushes with modified handles**

- Has been advised by your dental professional
- Can be readily cleaned and aerated
- Is durable and inexpensive
- Can be easily handled

**Toothpastes**
- Stannous fluoride toothpastes for better biofilm removal
  - Stannous has antibacterial properties
  - Fluoride has anticavity properties
  - Use these toothpastes to prevent gingivitis, hypersensitivity, and cavities

**Other cleaning aids**
- Fluoridated rinses and antibacterial rinses such as CPC (cetylpyridinium chloride) rinses
- Clean in between teeth with floss or interdental brushes
- Use a floss holder if you have trouble holding the floss

**References:**
