

Tips for Caregivers

Just like a healthy diet, seniors need healthy mouths. Follow these steps when cleaning your clients' teeth and gums:

1. **Planning:** Can they sit up? Can they spit? Show them the toothbrush and tell them your plan.
2. **Protect yourself:** Wash your hands and wear clean gloves.
3. **Find the best position for them:** Keep in mind problems of breathing and swallowing.
4. **Use Fluoridated toothpaste:** Use a "pea sized" amount.
5. **Toothbrushing:** Use a soft brush, half on teeth and half on gums.
6. **Lift the lip:** Look for bleeding, dark tooth spots, dry mouth, sores, changes on lip or roof of mouth.
7. **Remove and wash dentures:** Check mouth while dentures are out.
8. **Record or report:** If you have an employer, follow the policies. If at home, report any changes to their dentist or doctor.
9. **Rinse toothbrush:** Store toothbrush in dry location and replace it regularly.
10. **Remove gloves:** Be sure to wash your hands!

Preparing for Your Visit to the Dentist

Brush and floss before a dental visit.

Before the day of your visit

- Pick the best time of day for your appointment. Many seniors are at their best in the morning or early afternoon.
- Plan transportation well in advance. Medicaid or Specialized Transportation (Paratransit) may be options, but you will need to book 3 business days ahead.
- Special needs or disability? Tell the office in advance so they can prepare. Let them know if you will be arriving in a wheel chair.
- If you need medication, such as antibiotics, for a health condition or to relax you, talk with your doctor before the dental visit.
- Payment issues? Some dentists require payment at time of service. If this is not possible, make that clear ahead of time and ask about payment arrangements.

For local information on payment and other assistance programs for seniors, contact the Eldercare Locator at
1-800-677-1116
or
www.eldercare.gov

Day of your visit

- Wear comfortable clothing.
- Bring the following information: identification, social security number, dental insurance or Medicaid coupon, and emergency contact information.
- Bring a list of ALL the medications you take including over-the-counter medications.
- If you are diabetic, think about timing your meals to avoid low blood sugar.
- Go to the bathroom before your appointment. Sometimes sitting in the dental chair can feel like a long time.
- Don't schedule additional activities on the day of your dental visit.

Special Tips for Caregivers

- You may not want to tell your client about a dental visit until a day or so in advance – no need to cause additional stress.
- If your client is having trouble with new dentures make another appointment immediately.
- If your client is having teeth removed, have soft foods ready that are easy to eat. Examples are Jell-O, pudding, ice cream, and soup.

10 Simple Ways



to Promote Senior Smiles

Dental Tips for Seniors and Caregivers



Brochure developed by a committee of dental hygienists, caregivers, and doctors.



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10 Simple Ways to Promote Senior Smiles

1. Drink fluoridated water

Fluoride in drinking water makes everyone's teeth stronger. Check to see if your tap water contains fluoride. Talk to your dentist, hygienist, or doctor about benefits of water fluoridation.

2. Brush twice daily with fluoride toothpaste

Fluoride toothpaste is a good source of fluoride. Use a soft toothbrush, brush for at least 2 minutes, and remember to brush the tongue.

3. Use floss or toothpicks

Floss and toothpicks clean where brushes miss. When flossing, use a floss holder or your thumb and forefinger to control the floss. Ease the floss between the teeth and carefully rub the side of each tooth.

4. Have regular dental checkups, even if you have dentures

Treat problems early, before they become painful. Dentists can check how dentures are fitting and screen for oral cancer.



5. Limit the frequency of starchy snacks, sugared candy or cough drops

Bacteria in the mouth make acid from sweet and starchy foods. This acid lasts for 20 minutes each time we eat, and it damages the teeth. If we are always sipping soda, nibbling crackers or sucking on sugared candy or cough drops, our teeth are under constant attack. This often results in tooth decay.

6. Control diabetes

Diabetics who do not control their blood sugar often have gum problems. Talk with your doctor – many people do not know they have diabetes.

7. Don't use tobacco

Smoking and using smokeless tobacco, can cause gum disease and oral cancer. Avoiding tobacco will improve oral health and could save your life.

8. Check your mouth regularly for sores

Cancer can appear anywhere in the mouth and is often painless, so may be overlooked. If you notice a lump, bump or sore in the mouth that does not heal within two weeks, see your dentist or physician.

9. Understand the dangers of dry mouth

Saliva washes and protects the mouth. NEVER use sugared candy or cough drops. Sugar-free gum, sugar-free candy, and sugar-free cough drops are best.

10. Ask your dentist or doctor about fluoride varnish

Fluoride applied directly to the teeth adds extra protection against decay. This is very helpful for people with dry mouth and those receiving cancer treatments.

