

Mouth Care in Dysphagia

What is mouth care?

The term **mouth care** relates to the process of keeping your **teeth, gums and tongue** in a healthy condition. This involves keeping the **whole mouth clean and moist**, with healthy pink gums, and intact teeth or dentures.

Why is it important?

A healthy mouth is important for patient **dignity** and overall **patient health**. Poor mouth care can also cause difficulties with eating and drinking as well as lead to other health complications such as **chest infections**.



Mouth care and dysphagia (swallowing difficulties)

Patients with dysphagia are at a higher risk of food being left in the mouth after eating due to **reduced sensation** and/or **weak muscles of the tongue and cheeks**. This can lead to poor oral health as well as increase the risk of chest infections if mouth care is not completed regularly and thoroughly.

After a stroke it may also be difficult for patients to carry out good mouth care themselves due to arm weakness, visual difficulties, cognitive changes or coordination difficulties. It is important they receive **support from staff and family** to ensure adequate mouth care is completed.

When carrying out mouth care in patients with dysphagia **extra care** must be taken to **avoid swallowing** any debris, fluid or toothpaste as there is a higher risk of this entering the airway (aspiration).

How & when to carry out mouth care

It may be appropriate to continue using a **toothbrush** and **toothpaste/Non foaming toothpaste** with extra care to **spit out** any toothpaste/fluid after brushing. Take extra care with any mouth rinses (water and mouth wash) to ensure none is swallowed. **Dentures** should be **removed** from the mouth and cleaned using a **toothbrush** and **soaking solution** which needs to be **provided by family**. The cleaned dentures must be removed at night and placed in a labelled denture pot with no water. The use of **gel** to moisten the mouth may also be needed for some patients.



If the use of a toothbrush and toothpaste is not sufficient please liaise with the nursing staff regarding the provision of suitable alternatives.

Mouth care should be completed **at least twice a day** (morning and night). For patients with **dysphagia** it may also be appropriate to complete **before and after meals**.

Please speak to a member of staff if you experience any pain or discomfort with your mouth or if have any worries or concerns about your mouth care.