



SMILES

FOR A LIFETIME!

Oral Health Care for Seniors

A Guide for Home Health Care Providers

 ORAL HEALTH KANSAS

▮ A message for you, the home health care provider...

As a caregiver, you are as important as the dentist and dental hygienist in helping your clients achieve and maintain good oral health. The attention and care you give to them can have a dramatic impact on their overall health, wellness and quality of life. You help them feel better, suffer fewer health problems and enjoy life more.

By using this handbook, you will learn how problems in the mouth can affect a person's overall health, what causes poor oral health, and how you can help those in your care improve their oral health.

We will help you:

- Recognize signs of oral health problems
- Learn key steps to achieving and maintaining good oral health
- Create and carry out a daily oral health routine specific to each client's needs



Your caring makes a big difference.

Thank you for all that you do for others.

Your partner in oral health care,
Oral Health Kansas

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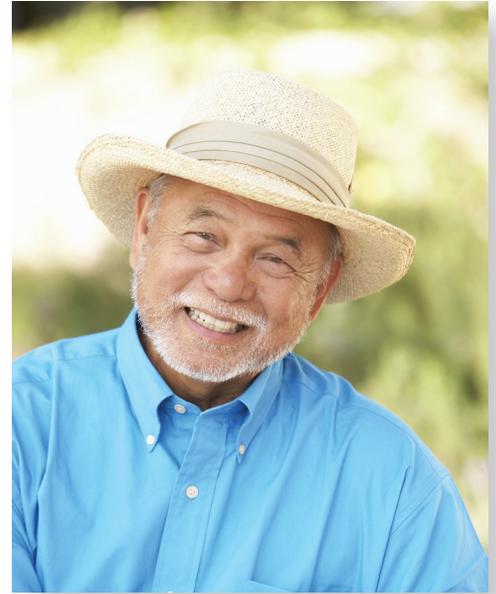
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III HOW POOR ORAL HEALTH AFFECTS OVERALL HEALTH

Most everyone understands that poor oral health can lead to tooth decay, loss of teeth and gum disease. But many don't realize the toll it can take on our overall health and well being, even diminishing our quality of life.

For example, did you know:

- **Pneumonia** may be linked to poor oral health.
- **Diabetes** is more difficult to control with infection in the mouth.
- **Infections** from untreated tooth decay may cause health problems and even create a risk of death.
- **Pain** resulting from oral health problems can significantly reduce the quality of life.
- **Heart disease, clogged arteries and stroke** may have poor oral health as one of several causes.
- **Poor nutrition** may happen when chewing foods cause pain, restricting people to soft diets.



Good health is something to smile about!

The mouth is a window to the body's health. Mayo Clinic



A lifetime smile begins with healthy teeth and mouths.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Because you are a valuable member of your clients' health care team, it is important that you be able to recognize and understand some of the key things that can affect oral health. Here are **six major** points for you to know.

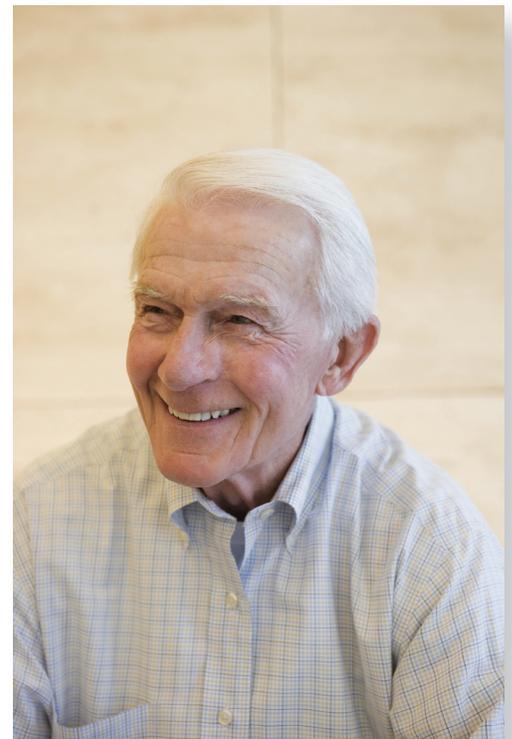
1. Signs of Oral Health Problems

- Broken or chipped teeth
- Bad breath, even when teeth and mouth are clean
- Tender or bleeding gums
- Painful chewing
- Loose teeth
- Sensitive teeth
- Mouth sores that don't heal
- Infection

If you see any of the above signs, you need to report them immediately, in writing and in person, to your supervisor.

2. Causes of Oral Health Problems

- Poor brushing and flossing practices
- Poor care of dentures and partials
- Dry mouth side effects of some medications
- Existing medical conditions
- Poor food choices and eating habits
- Lack of regular exposure to fluoride as recommended by dentists
- Ignoring dentists' recommendations for improved daily home care



*No problems
with this smile!*

3. How Poor Brushing and Flossing Affect Oral Health

- Food gets between the teeth and under the gums, bridges, partials and dentures.
- Food mixes with bacteria to produce acid that can cause tooth decay.
- Food that remains under the gums interacts with bacteria, causing puffy, bleeding gums.
- Tooth decay and gum disease, if not treated, can become a serious health problem.



*Brushing and flossing well –
the key to a winning smile.*

4. How Poor Nutrition Can Affect Oral Health

Unfortunately, some of the things we love the most are not good for our bodies OR our teeth and mouths. Foods and beverages high in sugar and simple carbohydrates are actually dangerous to teeth because bacteria in the mouth feed on these foods, generating acid for up to 20 minutes. When people eat such foods frequently, acid is attacking their teeth throughout the day.

Foods to watch out for include:

- Foods with sugar, such as cookies, candy, cake and pies
- Foods made with white flour like bread, cracker and chips
- Beverages with sugar, such as flavored milk, fruit drinks, iced tea, sports drinks and carbonated soft drinks



*You know what they say
about “an apple a day...”*

5. How Medications Can Affect Oral Health

More than 400 medications can cause dry mouth, a serious and uncomfortable condition that results with the mouth doesn't have enough saliva. Some of the common ones are those used to treat high blood pressure, anxiety, depression, allergies, Parkinson's disease and pain.

Dry mouth is a problem for two reasons:

First, saliva isn't present to wash away food particles left in the mouth after eating, which leaves more time for bacteria to produce acid for tooth decay.

Second, many of the products people use to add moisture to the mouth are high in sugar – hard candies, cough drops, chewing gum and soft drinks. All this sugar makes a good home for even more bacteria. And, because people tend to suck on hard candy or drink sugary drinks throughout the day, the bacteria have a lot of time to work on tooth decay.

Medications also may contain sugar, especially over-the-counter medications, such as cough syrup, antacids, and cough drops. If people use medications with high sugar content daily, they need to rinse their mouths out with a bit of water each time to clear away the sugar.

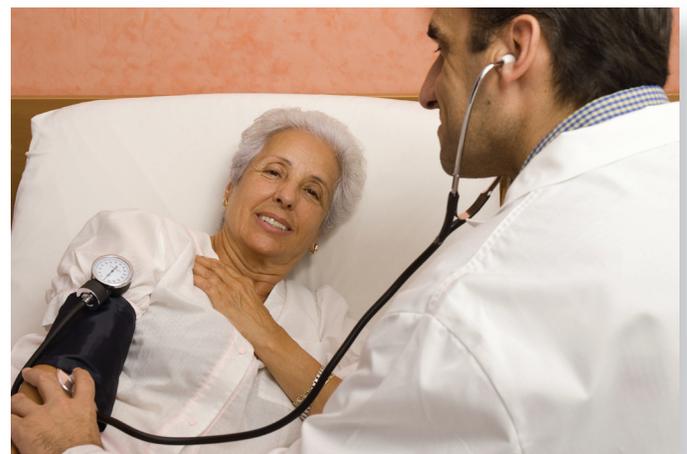
Rx: Do not ever stop taking prescribed medications without consulting the doctor.



Medications can cause dry mouth.

6. How Medical Conditions Can Affect Oral Health

- People with diabetes are more prone to gum disease.
- Cancer treatments can cause dry mouth and other serious oral conditions.
- People who have arthritis or who have had a stroke may have difficulty brushing or flossing.
- People with kidney problems may have bad breath.

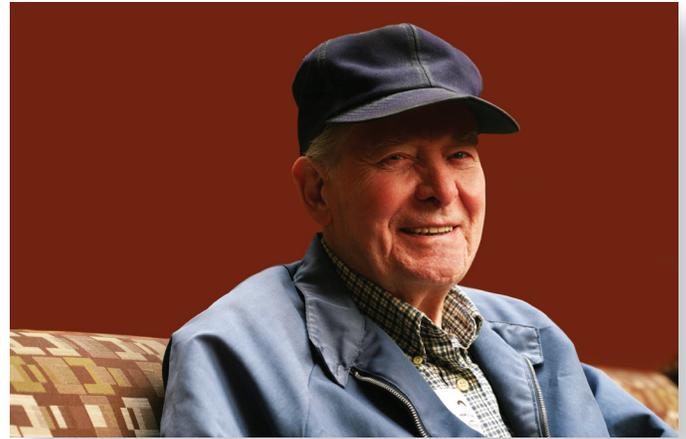


Medical conditions can cause dry mouth.

III A DAILY ROUTINE FOR GOOD ORAL HEALTH

The first thing to remember when beginning a daily care routine with your clients is that you must follow the oral health care plan developed by their dentists, hygienists and your supervisor. This plan can include toothbrushing, flossing and special mouth rinses, as well as using certain tools, products and techniques to help make the job easier for you and your clients.

Follow these activities on a daily basis when caring for your clients' oral health:



III Proper Brushing

- Use only a small amount of toothpaste – the size of a pea usually is enough.
- Use only ADA-approved toothpaste with fluoride.
- Use a soft-bristle brush with rounded bristles.
- Brush each tooth surface 10 strokes, making sure to brush along the gum line.
- Brush in gentle, round motions.
- Brush the tongue to remove bacteria collected there.
- Spit out the saliva but do not rinse with water – it washes away the fluoride.
- Follow the dentist's directions for using prescribed or recommended mouth rinses to reduce harmful bacteria in the mouth or increase fluoride to strengthen tooth enamel.
- Brush each morning and right after the last snack for the night.

Following the dentist's directions leads to a healthy mouth.

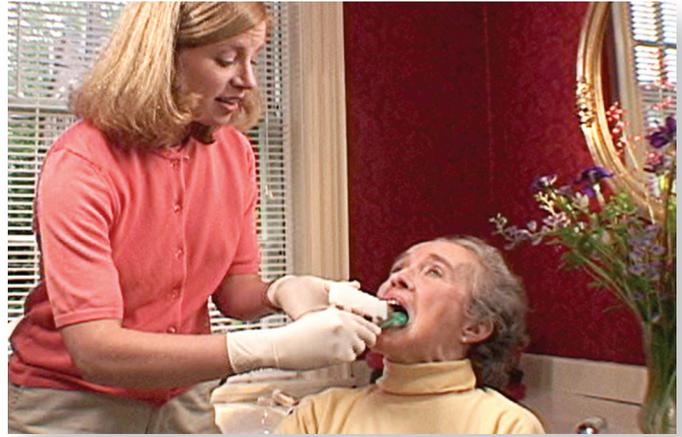


Brushing morning and night means an all-day smile.

How to Brush Another Person's Teeth

Before you begin to brush another person's teeth, ask these key questions to determine his or her abilities:

- Can she tolerate the feel of the toothbrush in her mouth and taste of toothpaste?
- Does the person know the complete steps in thorough toothbrushing and flossing?
- Can he or she stand at the sink or sit up in a chair?
- Can he keep his mouth open for a complete brushing and flossing or does he need several rest stops for comfort?
- Can she brush and floss her own teeth?
- Does he need a special prop to hold her mouth open while you brush?



*Help your clients
enjoy that fresh,
clean feeling
that comes from
brushing.*

For clients who can brush their own teeth, you can teach them the correct way to brush by putting your hand over theirs.

Once you understand the person's level of ability, you can choose the best way to position yourself and your client. And, keep in mind that you can brush teeth anywhere. Don't restrict yourself to the bathroom. Choose a place of accessibility and comfort for both of you.

Here are the steps to take every time you brush another's teeth:

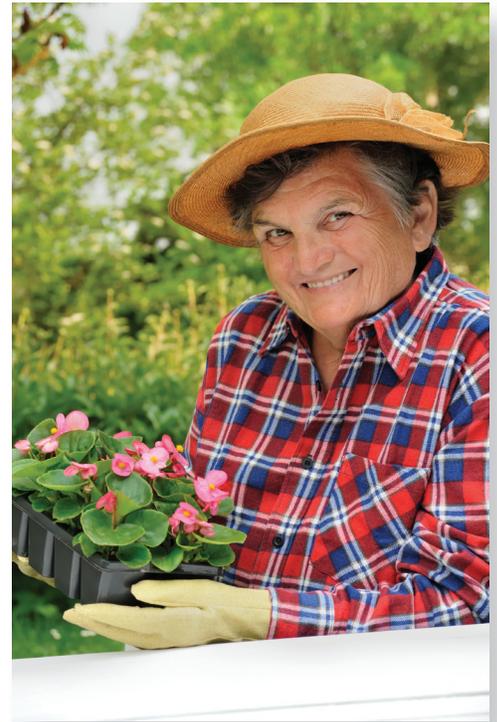
1. Put on gloves, which is a must whenever you work in another person's mouth.
2. Have the person sit in a chair. If he or she is in a wheelchair, make sure it's locked in position.
3. Drape a towel over the person's clothes and shoulders
4. Select the best position for both of you, based on the person's abilities – usually to the side or behind the chair for the best angle of your arm.
5. Support your body by bracing one leg back or against a wall for support.
6. Tilt back the person's head if possible so you can see your actions. A pillow or towel can be used to help support the neck.
7. If the person cannot control arm movements that interfere with brushing, position him or her close to a table or sink with hands in lap, or have another helper gently hold the person's hands.
8. If the person resists toothbrushing, he or she may be in pain or fearful; ask for guidance from a dental professional and your supervisor.

III Cleaning Dentures and Partial Dentures

Dentures must be cleaned every day to remove plaque, bacteria, stain and food particles. People who wear dentures must remove them during sleep to allow the soft gum tissue to rest, breathe and heal from any irritations.

The American Dental Association recommends the following steps for cleaning dentures and partial dentures:

- Because dentures are delicate and can break if dropped even a few inches, always line a sink and counter with a heavy towel before your start.
- Rest the dentures in the palm of your hand for a secure grip.
- Clean daily, just as you would with natural teeth.
- Rinse away loose food particles thoroughly.
- Use a brush designed especially for dentures or a brush with SOFT bristles.
- Moisten the brush and apply special denture cleanser.
- Brush every surface, scrubbing gently to avoid damage to the dentures.
- Soak dentures in cool water or special solution prescribed by the dentist; they can lose their shape if dried out.
- Use the soaking solution recommended by the client's dentist.
- Do not soak dentures in hot water – they can warp.
- Clean the denture storage box or glass daily.



*Enjoy life more with
good oral health.*



*Keeping dentures clean
is as important as
keeping teeth clean.*

■ Proper Flossing

Flossing each day is as important as toothbrushing. The floss removes plaque and food particles between the teeth that brushing doesn't remove. Without proper flossing, a build up of bacteria can cause tooth decay and gum disease, leading to infection and illness.

The best way to floss:

- Use a piece of floss about 18 inches long, wrapping it around the first joint of the middle finger of each hand.
- Grip the floss between the thumb and index finger of each hand.
- Floss between all teeth.
- Work the floss gently between the teeth until it reaches the gum line.
- Curve the floss around each tooth and slip it under the gum; slide the floss up and down for both sides of every tooth, one side at the time.
- Adjust the floss a little as you move from tooth to tooth so the floss is clean for each one.
- If you have trouble flossing, try using one of the many varieties of floss holders available at retail stores.

■ How to Floss Another Person's Teeth

Depending on the client's ability to floss his or her own teeth, choose the best position to take as described in "How to Brush Another Person's Teeth."

Then follow these simple steps:

- Wear gloves.
- Use a floss holder if it works better than wrapping the floss around your fingers.
- Move your position from one side of the person to the other for best leverage.
- If the person is resistant, start out just flossing the lower front teeth. As he or she becomes more tolerant – this may take several days – gradually add more teeth to the routine.
- Be aware that the gums may bleed a tiny bit if the person hasn't flossed regularly.
- If the gums continue to bleed over time or if they cause the person pain, report this to your supervisor, who can arrange for a dental examination.



*Keep flossing,
keep smiling!*

Using Mouth Rinses

Follow the dentist's directions for using prescribed or recommended mouth rinses to reduce harmful bacteria in the mouth or increase fluoride to strengthen tooth enamel.

Chronic dry mouth, infections or other conditions might call for special rinses to be prescribed by a dentist. In these cases, it is important that you understand the dentist's recommendations and follow instructions carefully. Also make sure the dentist has approved any over-the-counter mouthwash the person wishes to use. Some rinses contain alcohol, which dries out the mouth. Chronic bad breath needs to be discussed with the dentist rather than covered up with mouthwash.

Managing Dry Mouth

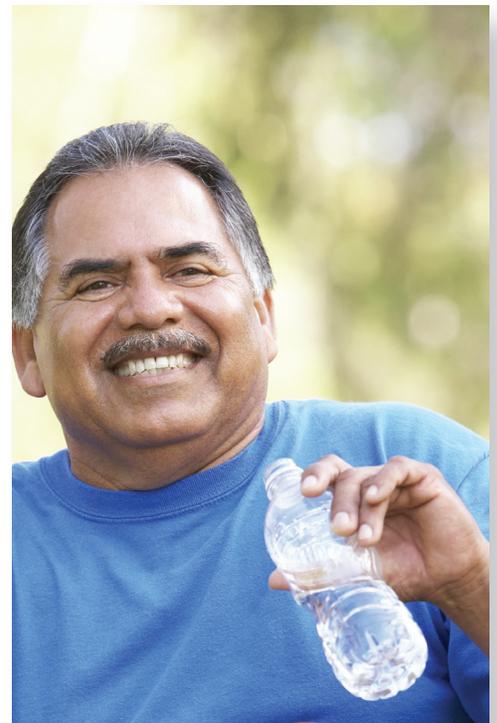
Everyone gets a dry mouth once in a while – when nervous, upset or under stress. But if a person has dry mouth most of the time, it is not only uncomfortable but can lead to serious dental and health problems.

Signs that your client may have dry mouth include:

- Sticky, dry feeling in mouth
- Trouble chewing, swallowing, tasting, or speaking
- Burning feeling in the mouth
- Dry feeling in the throat
- Cracked lips
- Dry, rough tongue
- Mouth sores

If your client complains of dry mouth, or if you notice any of these symptoms, ask the dentist for recommendations. These likely will include having your client:

- Sip water or sugar-free drinks often, including with meals
- Chew sugar-free gum or suck on sugar-free hard candy
- Avoid tobacco, alcohol, caffeine drinks and spicy or salty foods, which dry the mouth
- Use a prescribed or dentist-recommended over-the-counter rinse made for dry mouth
- Use a humidifier in the bedroom at night



*Dry mouths love
lots of water.*

▮ Develop Good Nutrition Habits

Eating “Teeth Healthy” foods and beverages is essential for good oral health. Encouraging your clients and their families to follow good nutrition practices can go far toward achieving and maintaining good overall health.

Here’s a list of DOs and DON’Ts for you and your client to keep handy:

- DO choose a diet of fresh vegetables, fruits, dairy products, protein and whole grain breads and crackers.
- DO limit foods with sugar and starches to mealtimes instead of as a snack.
- DO have planned snacks; munching throughout the day leads to decay.
- DO make carbonated beverages and sweets part of mealtime rather than snacking on them between meals.
- DON’T sip all day on beverages that contain sugar, such as fruit juice, milk, sports drinks, carbonated soft drinks – they create the acid that eats away at tooth enamel.
- DON’T snack on chips, pretzels, French fries, and bread; they produce as much acid as sweets.



*Healthy snacks mean
healthy teeth.*

III CLIENT'S CHECKLIST FOR A LIFETIME SMILE

- ___ Brush your teeth in the morning and at bedtime, 10 times for each tooth.
- ___ Use toothpaste with fluoride.
- ___ Floss daily.
- ___ Clean your dentures.
- ___ Pay attention each day for signs of food caught between your teeth and for loose teeth and mouth sores.
- ___ Tell your dentist and physician if you have a mouth sore that lasts more than a month.
- ___ Eat "teeth healthy" foods at mealtimes.
- ___ Choose "teeth healthy" snack foods, like fresh fruits and vegetables, cheese, whole grain crackers.
- ___ Limit sugar and starches to mealtimes only.
- ___ Limit milk and fruit juices at mealtimes only.
- ___ Choose water to drink when you are thirsty – tap water with fluoride is best.
- ___ Sip water, chew sugar-free gum, suck on sugar-free hard candy; ask the dentist about products to moisten your mouth.
- ___ Avoid drinking beverages with sugar – soda, sports drinks, flavored coffee.
- ___ Limit chips, crackers, candy and cookies; these can lead to decay, excess weight and poor nutrition habits.
- ___ Have your teeth cleaned regularly by a dental hygienist.
- ___ Have a dental examination at least each year to care for your teeth, dentures, gums and mouth.
- ___ Have an examination for oral cancer each year.
- ___ Treat oral disease when it is diagnosed; waiting puts you at greater risk for dental and health problems.

III SHOPPING LIST

Name of client _____

Type of toothbrush preferred _____

Type of toothpaste preferred _____

Type of floss preferred _____

Type of mouth rinse recommended by the client's dentist _____

Type of product recommended for dry mouth by the dentist _____

Type of sugar-free beverages, lozenges, gum preferred _____

Type of "teeth healthy" snacks preferred _____



The idea for this handbook came from the Smiles for a Lifetime Team at Central Plains Area Agency on Aging.



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