

Dental visits

Generally, regular dental visits, i.e. dental check-ups twice per year, should be kept as a routine. Early detection of oral diseases, if any, will mean less extensive treatment.

You are part of the team that is looking after the oral health of those in your care. If any pain, discomfort or behaviour changes are noticed while delivering oral health care for the elderly person (e.g. during toothbrushing), contact the regular dentist, if any, or the nearest dental clinic. In addition, you will play an important role during the dental visit especially for the elderly with dementia or related conditions.

- > Inform the dentist of your concerns or any changes you noted in the elderly person's mouth
- > Inform the dentist of who can give consent for treatment
- > Provide comprehensive information to the dentist about medical conditions and medications, if any
- > Tell the dentist if you have noticed any behaviour changes in the elderly person in your care
- > Help the dentist during the dental procedure, for example, hold the elderly person's hand
- > When making an appointment inform the dentist and/or receptionist of the preferred time of the day for the elderly person



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Colgate Oral Care

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Oral Health Care
for the Elderly

Information for Carers

Special Topic Pamphlet No. 9

Why healthy teeth and gums are important for elderly people

- > To eat and talk comfortably
- > To feel happy with their appearance
- > To stay pain and infection free
- > To maintain self-esteem

Unhealthy teeth and gums affect general health and quality of life.

Frailty and/or conditions like dementia might impair elderly peoples' self-care ability and put them at high risk of developing oral diseases including tooth decay and gum diseases. Some elderly people depend on their carers such as their spouse or other family members for their daily activities, including oral health care.

This pamphlet aims to help carers look after the oral health of elderly people in their care.

Daily oral health care at home

Oral hygiene

- > Tooth brushing
- > Brush carefully around the whole mouth angling the brush bristles toward the gum, then brush the chewing surfaces of the teeth
- > Brush teeth with toothpaste containing fluoride twice a day
- > Use a powered toothbrush for elderly people who experience difficulties in using a manual toothbrush, e.g. those with arthritis
- > Denture care
- > Thoroughly brush denture with commercial denture paste or soap, especially at night
- > After cleaning, soak denture overnight in clean water

Dry mouth

- > When possible, drink tap water to keep mouth moist
- > Use a dry mouth gel or spray to lubricate dry mouth

Diet

- > Eat a healthy diet
- > Control sugar in the diet
- > Clean the teeth after meals or drink tap water to rinse mouth and wash away food particles from teeth

Fluoride toothpaste

Fluoride can help the teeth to remain strong and prevent tooth decay.

Talk to the dentist about the need for a high dose fluoride toothpaste.

Elderly people with dementia or related conditions

- > Be prepared to spend enough time with them
- > A bent toothbrush may be useful
- > Keep trying, do not give up



The following techniques may be helpful when trying to brush an older person's teeth:

1 Overcoming fear of being touched

- > Build a good relationship
- > Be calm, friendly and non-demanding
- > Gently try introducing a toothbrush to the mouth and start oral care



2 Bridging

- > Mimic brushing your teeth
- > Place a toothbrush in the older person's hand and encourage the person to brush his or her teeth



3 Chaining

- > Take the older person's hand and toothbrush to his or her mouth
- > Explain the activity and start brushing
- > Let the older person continue



4 Hand over Hand

- > Place your hand over the older person's hand
- > Brush the older person's teeth together



5 Distraction

- > Place a familiar item in the older person's hand to distract his or her attention
- > Now brush the older person's teeth



6 Rescuing

- > If the person becomes agitated, say you are sorry they are upset, reassure them and say you'll leave and ask another person who is very kind to come and help them