

FOR NON-ORAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

Oral Hygiene

Background

Oral hygiene is the practice of maintaining the cleanliness and health of the mouth, teeth, gums, and tongue. Good oral hygiene plays an important role in preventing dental problems such as tooth decay, gum disease, bad breath, and tooth loss and promotes overall health and well-being. Poor oral health has been linked to various systemic diseases, such as diabetes and heart disease^{1,2}.




Non-dental professionals, such as teachers, caregivers, and health workers, can have a crucial role in demonstrating and promoting good oral hygiene practices to individuals under their care, especially children and the elderly. It is essential to have a clear understanding of the basic techniques and tools involved in maintaining good oral hygiene.



Key components of oral hygiene

- **Brushing for two minutes, twice a day:** toothbrushing helps remove food debris and plaque, which might otherwise lead to tooth decay and gum disease;
- **Brushing every surface:** use of a manual or electric toothbrush to brush the inside, outside and chewing surfaces of the teeth. Brush in circular motions for children and sweeping for adults – not back and forth;
- **Using fluoride toothpaste:** fluoride plays a key role in the fight against tooth decay. Make sure the toothpaste has the correct amount of fluoride for the patient's age.

Guide to toothpaste according to age

For children aged 0-3	Start brushing when teeth begin to come through, using a smear of toothpaste with no less than 1000ppm fluoride;	
For children aged 3-6	Use a pea-size amount of toothpaste with between 1000-1500 ppm fluoride;	
From aged 7 through to adulthood	Use a toothpaste with between 1350-1500 ppm fluoride;	

Appropriately qualified members of the dental team may recommend toothpastes with higher strength fluoride for children and adults considered to be at high risk of dental decay.

Reference for the fluoride toothpaste guide above:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/delivering-better-oral-health-an-evidence-based-toolkit-for-prevention/chapter-2-summary-guidance-tables-for-dental-teams>

- **No rinsing with water straight after brushing:** this can wash the protective fluoride away. Spit out any excess toothpaste instead (spit don't rinse);
- **Replacing toothbrushes every three months:** the average life of a toothbrush is about three months. Brushing with an old toothbrush will not clean the teeth and mouth effectively. Replace any toothbrush with splayed, worn-looking, or missing bristles. Remember that a toothbrush is a personal item;
- **Floss once a day or use interdental brushes:** interdental cleaners help reach those difficult areas between your teeth. Regular cleaning helps to dislodge food and may reduce gum disease and bad breath by removing the plaque that forms along the gum line;
- **Protect the mouth while on the go:** when brushing is not possible, rinse with a fluoride mouthwash or chew sugar-free gum after meals and snacks.

Oral healthcare delivery framework

Educate yourself on the correct oral hygiene techniques and tools, including toothbrushing, flossing, and using mouthwash. Gather necessary supplies like soft-bristled toothbrushes, fluoride toothpaste, dental floss, and mouthwash for the individuals under your care. A demonstration model may be helpful.

Ask

Ask the individuals for whom you are responsible about their oral hygiene habits.

Look

Observe and assess the oral hygiene practices of the individuals under your care. Identify areas where they may need guidance or improvement, such as using correct brushing and flossing techniques or choosing the right oral care products.

Decide

Based on your assessment, determine the best approach to teach and promote proper oral hygiene practices to the individuals under your care. Tailor your teaching methods to suit their age, abilities, and preferences.

Many resources are available, for example:

For children aged 10-12: the FDI Mouth heroes' cartoon:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gxbQGGcX-U0>

For adults:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UhwZWtiaQNw>

Act

Implement a teaching plan for maintaining good oral hygiene by demonstrating proper oral hygiene techniques step by step. Encourage the individuals under your care to follow along and practice the techniques as you demonstrate them. Provide ongoing support and supervision as needed to ensure they maintain good oral hygiene habits.

- Toothbrushing: Show them how to hold the toothbrush at a 45-degree angle against the gum line, using gentle, circular / sweeping motions to clean all tooth surfaces. Explain the importance of brushing for two minutes, twice a day with a soft toothbrush. Use plaque disclosing tablets if available.
- Interdental cleaners and flossing: Demonstrate how to use floss and interdental brushes. Take both ends of a length of floss and hold between the thumb and index finger of each hand. Guide gently between the teeth using a back-and-forth motion. Show how to curve the floss around the base of each tooth, cleaning below the gum line. If possible, demonstrate how to use interdental cleaners.

Document

Keep a record of your teaching sessions and any progress or challenges. Use this to refine your teaching methods and ensure that the individuals under your care maintain good oral hygiene.

This factsheet is supported by:



References

1. FDI World Dental Federation. About oral health: How to practice good oral hygiene. Available from: <https://www.fdiworlddental.org/how-practice-good-oral-hygiene#:~:text=Brush%20for%20two%20minutes%2C%20twice,chewing%20surfaces%20of%20your%20tee> [Accessed on 14 March 2024].
2. The Department of Health and Social Care. The Delivering Better Oral Health Toolkit. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/delivering-better-oral-health-an-evidence-based-toolkit-for-prevention/chapter-2-summary-guidance-tables-for-dental-teams> [Accessed on 14 March 2024].
OR <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-teeth-and-gums/taking-care-of-childrens-teeth/> [Accessed on 14 March 2024].

Other Resources

FDI World Dental Federation. Educational module for other healthcare professionals. Available from: [Educational Module for Other Healthcare Professionals | FDI \(fdiworlddental.org\)](#) [Accessed on 14 March 2024].

FDI World Dental Federation. Brush Day & Night. Available from: [Brush Day & Night | FDI \(fdiworlddental.org\)](#) [Accessed on 14 March 2024].

FDI World Dental Federation. Role of mouthwash in oral care. Available from: [Role of mouthwash in oral care | FDI \(fdiworlddental.org\)](#) [Accessed on 14 March 2024].

FDI World Dental Federation. Oral health in comprehensive cleft care. Available from: [Oral health in comprehensive cleft care | FDI \(fdiworlddental.org\)](#) [Accessed on 14 March 2024].

Glenny M, Walsh T, Iwasaki M, Kateeb E, Minatel Braga M, Riley P, Melo P. Development of Tooth Brushing Recommendations Through Professional Consensus. *Int Dent J.* 2023;000: 1-10. Available from: [Development of Tooth Brushing Recommendations Through Professional Consensus \(sciencedirectassets.com\)](#) [Accessed on 14 March 2024].

Disclaimer:

The provided fact sheet offers general information and may require adaptation to suit the unique scope of work and regulations governing other healthcare professionals in each country.