



Things to Think About!

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By Karen Morgan

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ADA
American Dental Association
www.ada.org/public/topics/cleaning_faqs.asp



www.drpoulsen.com



www.scdonline.org

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Dental Care for the Disabled

Contributed By Keith J. Poulsen, DDS, PC

Proper dental care is essential for someone with a physical or mental disability just as it is for anyone else. In the case of a disabled person, dental care is usually provided by the caregiver. Sometimes a disability can make the cleaning process more complicated and can pose additional challenges for the caregiver and the individual. This article will discuss some equipment and techniques that should make the cleaning process easier and more effective.



ORAL CARE

Necessary Equipment

1. Toothbrush: mechanical or manual are both acceptable
2. Dental Floss
3. Dental Floss holder: holds floss so flossing can be completed with one hand
4. Mouth Prop: available commercially or you can tape 5 or 6 tongue depressors or popsicle sticks together
5. Washcloth or small towel

Location

Find a location where the lighting is excellent. You should have sufficient room to move around the person's chair if one is required. If you can lay the individual down with their head in your lap, do so.

Frequency

One cleaning per day is minimal, even for individuals with feeding tubes. If the person eats regular meals, you need to clean at least twice daily.

...continued on page 2

Procedure

Do not use any toothpaste!

Lay their head in your lap if possible. If the person is in a chair, position yourself behind them. Recline the chair if you can so you can be seated.

Place the mouth prop in one side of the mouth and support it with one hand. Brush the teeth on the opposite side. Brush one tooth at a time. Clean each surface and the gum tissue. Clean the half of the mouth opposite the mouth prop. Floss this half of the mouth with the floss holder.



Move the mouth prop to the other side of the mouth and complete the above steps on the other side of the mouth. Brush the tongue as best you can.

Remove the mouth prop and wipe any mess off the individual's face. Like anything else, practice will make this endeavor a bit easier.

Diet

Proper diet is just as important to a person's dental health as good oral hygiene. Exposure to sugars must be minimal. Both the amount and the frequency of exposure must be strictly controlled.

HEALTH COMPLICATIONS RELATED TO ORAL HYGIENE

We know that any infection present in the mouth can and will be transmitted throughout the entire body. Recent studies show that poor oral hygiene contributes to complications regarding heart disease and diabetes.

These health problems are linked directly to the buildup of dental plaque. If not regularly removed by brushing and flossing, bacteria from the mouth can travel into the circulatory system and cause plaque buildup and inflammation in blood vessels. Over time, this condition can increase the risk of heart attack and stroke.

Diabetics have an increased risk of gum disease. If gum disease develops, the presence of gingivitis and periodontitis can destabilize blood sugar levels making diabetes more difficult to control. Therefore, diabetics must be especially vigilant about regular and effective brushing and flossing.

Although oral hygiene for a disabled person can take a little more time and effort, the benefits are well worth it! Regular brushing, flossing, and visiting the dentist every 6 months can protect them not only against gum disease and dental decay, but also against heart disease and diabetes. Good oral hygiene is essential to maintaining total health!

Dr. Poulsen is a Board Certified Pediatric Dentist in Salt Lake City, Utah. He specializes in the specific dental needs of children and adolescents as well as disabled patients of all ages. He has been making smiles beautiful for 30 years!

Dr. Poulsen graduated from the University of Nebraska in 1971. He received his pediatric specialty degree from the University of Nebraska in 1973. He then taught at Creighton University from 1973 to 1976 as an associate professor. He returned to Salt Lake City and opened his practice in August of 1976.