

Oral Care for the Stroke Recovery Patient

An Easy Guide to Follow

After a stroke it is crucial to keep the mouth as clean as possible. If the mouth is not clean or there is gum disease, bacteria will form. If the bacteria in the saliva is inhaled into the lungs (i.e. aspirated), aspiration pneumonia may develop.

How can you reduce your risk of developing an aspiration pneumonia?

1. **Brush your teeth at least twice a day** – in the morning, after breakfast, and in the evening just before bedtime.

If you have any memory difficulties you may need reminders to brush your teeth. A caregiver may need to check your mouth and teeth to confirm they are clean.

If you have difficulty with your hand you may require a thick handled toothbrush or a special foam grip placed over the toothbrush handle. An electric toothbrush has a larger handle and is an excellent tool for cleaning your teeth.

Toothpaste is optional and depends on personal preference. Toothpaste **would not be used** if you have a swallowing problem and can not expectorate (i.e. spit).

2. **Clean the tongue by brushing lightly using a toothbrush or a tongue scraper.**

The tongue harbors millions of bacteria which can cause bad breath. Aspirated bacteria may be a source of respiratory infections.

3. **Floss once per day.** Remember that a clean mouth includes flossing. Bacteria and food get trapped between your teeth where they can cause cavities, gum disease, and bad breath.

4. **Visit your dentist regularly for dental “check-ups”** (*at least once per year*).

5. **Have professional dental cleanings at least twice per year.**

Depending on your health, the condition of your mouth and how quickly you accumulate plaque and tartar, you may need your teeth cleaned more often (*possibly as often as every 3 months*).

Your dental professional will advise the best course of treatment for your needs.

If someone is helping you he/she may need to:

- seat you in a chair and stand behind you
- pull your lower lip with their thumb and hold your chin
- assist you while brushing by using a “hand-over-hand” technique to guide the toothbrush in your mouth
- remind you to spit every so often so that you do not aspirate the accumulated saliva



If you have a SWALLOWING PROBLEM and need assistance to brush your teeth:

- you will need to use a special toothbrush with a suction device to prevent aspiration of your saliva during cleaning
- toothpaste is not recommended as it may be aspirated
- slightly moisten the toothbrush slightly with water but avoid having it wet
- clean the teeth and suction
- after brushing, use a slightly moistened swab containing a fluoride rinse and rub over the surface of the teeth.
- piggy-back mouth care with other tasks such as bathing