



Building Better Oral Health Communities

Better Oral Health in Home Care

Care of natural teeth



Government of South Australia
SA Health



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Disclaimer

While every effort was made to ensure the information was accurate and up to date at the time of production, some information may become superseded as future research and new oral hygiene products are developed. In addition, the information in this resource is not intended as a substitute for a health professional's advice in relation to any oral health issues of concern.

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Care of natural teeth

Tooth enamel is mainly made up of minerals including calcium. When food is eaten, bacteria in dental plaque convert sugars and starches into acid, which can dissolve the minerals out of teeth. If the teeth are not cleaned, this can lead to tooth decay, infections and pain. Good oral care is extremely important to help avoid tooth decay. Fluoride toothpaste helps strengthen teeth as well as reverse the effects of acid produced by the bacteria in dental plaque. Bacteria in dental plaque also contribute to gum disease. Severe gum disease results in the breakdown of gums and bone that support the teeth causing tooth loss and pain. This affects general health and wellbeing.



Better oral health in home care

Encourage and support clients to:

- brush their teeth, gums and tongue twice a day
- use a soft toothbrush
- use a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste
- spit but don't rinse after brushing
- replace the toothbrush every 3 months.

This is important because:

- brushing is the best way to remove dental plaque
- a soft toothbrush is gentle on the gums
- fluoride toothpaste protects teeth
- not rinsing allows fluoride to be absorbed by the teeth
- a frayed toothbrush is not effective.

Oral hygiene aids and products



Use a fluoride toothpaste.
Use a soft toothbrush.

Standard precautions



Wash hands before and after, and wear gloves for oral care.

Toothbrush alternatives



Modified soft toothbrush

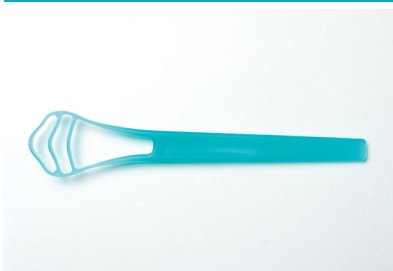
A soft toothbrush can be bent to give better access to the mouth.
A forward bent toothbrush can be used to brush the inner upper and lower teeth.
A backward bent toothbrush can be used to retract the cheek, while another toothbrush is used to brush the client's teeth.



Electric toothbrush

An electric toothbrush may help older people with limited manual dexterity, due to stroke or arthritis for example, to manage brushing by themselves.
Vibration can be a problem for some older people.
Cost and maintenance can be a barrier.

Additional oral hygiene aids



Tongue scraper

This can be used as an alternative when a toothbrush is not able to clean the surface of the tongue sufficiently; for example, when thrush is present.



Hand grip

This is useful for older people with reduced grip strength.

Toothpaste application



Use fluoride toothpaste morning and night.
Only a small pea-sized amount of toothpaste is required.

Positioning



When the client requires assistance, try different positions to suit the situation.

Standing in front position

Sit the client in a chair facing you.

If the client is in bed you will need to support their head with pillows.

Support the client's chin with your index finger and thumb, being careful not to place pressure on the client's throat with your remaining fingers. This is sometimes referred to as a 'pistol grip'.

The thumb holding the chin can be used to roll down and hold the lower lip for better vision and access.

Good eye contact between you and the client is maintained with this position.

Cuddle Position

Stand behind and to the side of the client.

Rest the client's head against the side of your body and arm.

Support the client's chin with your index finger and thumb, being careful not to place pressure on the client's throat with your remaining fingers. This is sometimes referred to as a 'pistol grip'.

The thumb holding the chin can be used to roll down and hold the lower lip for better vision and access.

Greater head control is achieved by using this position.

Toothbrushing technique lower teeth



Outside



Biting side



Inside

Toothbrushing technique upper teeth



Outside



Biting side



Inside

Toothbrushing

Gently brush in a circular motion, the outside, biting side and inside of all teeth. Pay particular attention to where the tooth meets the gum.

If some teeth are missing, make sure all surfaces of single teeth are cleaned.

Encourage the client to spit not rinse after brushing.

If the client finds this difficult to accept, encourage them to wipe a little bit of toothpaste on their front teeth after rinsing.

Bleeding gums

Bleeding is usually caused by a build-up of dental plaque.

Brushing is the best way to remove dental plaque and heal the gums.

Continue to brush teeth twice a day paying particular attention to where the tooth meets the gum.

Report bleeding gums to the care coordinator and in particular if the bleeding does not resolve within a week of correct brushing.

Retracting the cheek



A second bent toothbrush can be used to retract the client's cheek.
This technique provides better access and vision when brushing teeth or checking a client's mouth.

Tongue cleaning



Ask the client to stick out their tongue.
Scrape the tongue carefully from the back to the front.
Do not go too far back as it will cause the client to gag.

Toothbrush care



After brushing

Thoroughly rinse the toothbrush under running water.
Tap the toothbrush on the sink to remove excess water.
Store the toothbrush uncovered in a dry place.
Replace the toothbrush with a new one when:

- bristles become frayed
- with the change of seasons (every three months)
- following an illness such as a 'bad cold'.

When a client is being treated for a fungal infection (such as thrush), replace the toothbrush when the treatment starts and again when the treatment finishes.

If a toothbrush grip is used, remove the grip and wash and dry the toothbrush handle and grip after each use.

Treatment for gum disease

If a client is being treated for gum disease, the dentist or GP may have prescribed the application of an antibacterial product such as chlorhexidine.

Chlorhexidine and fluoride toothpaste should not be used within 2 hours of each other as the product effectiveness is reduced.

The client may need to be reminded of this. An alternative suggestion is for the client to apply the chlorhexidine product after lunch.

