



Relief of Dry Mouth (Xerostomia)

Reduced saliva flow is known as dry mouth or xerostomia and is common in residents of aged care facilities. Relief from dry mouth also reduces tooth decay, gum disease and other oral diseases.

Protective Oral Hygiene

Relief of Dry Mouth

Saliva is the key to maintaining a healthy mouth. Medications taken by residents contribute to dry mouth. When the quantity and quality of saliva is reduced, oral diseases can develop very quickly. Dry mouth increases the incidence of mouth ulcers and oral infection. Dry mouth can be very uncomfortable for the resident.

Recommended Oral Health Care

Keep the mouth moist by frequent rinsing and sipping with water (and increase water intake if appropriate). Keep the lips moist by frequently applying a water-based lip moisturiser. Discourage the resident from sipping fruit juices, cordial or sugary drinks. Reduce the intake of caffeine drinks. Stimulate saliva production with tooth friendly lollies as required. Encourage the resident to drink water after meals, medications, other drinks and snacks, to keep the mouth clean.

Oral Hygiene Aids & Products



A dry mouth product best suited to the resident can be recommended by the dentist.

There are a variety of products available; for example:

- Oral Balance gel or liquid
- GC Dry Mouth gel
- Hamilton Aquae mouth spray.

Apply water-based lip moisturiser; for example, KY Jelly or Oral Base Gel.

A variety of tooth friendly xylitol lollies are available. Look for the 'happy tooth' symbol on the packet.

Standard Precautions

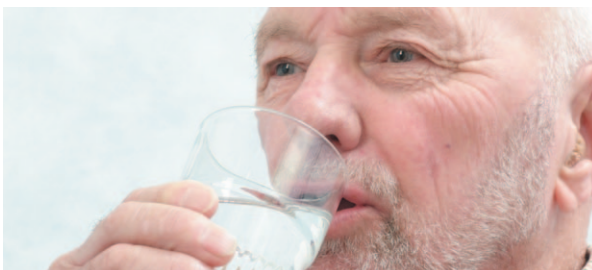


Wash hands before and after oral care.

RN to determine precautions dependent on risk management assessment. Consider:

- Gloves
- Eye/facial protection (glasses/face shield)
- Gown
- Mask

Keep Mouth Moist



Encourage the resident to frequently sip cold water especially after meals, medications, other drinks and snacks.

Reduce intake of caffeine drinks such as coffee, tea.

Apply saliva substitutes according to the oral health care plan to teeth, gums, inside of cheeks, roof of mouth and the fitting surface of dentures.

Saliva substitutes are especially useful before bed, upon awakening and before eating.

If appropriate, tooth friendly lollies may be used to stimulate saliva. Look for the 'happy tooth' symbol on the packet.

Keep Lips Moist



Apply a water-based lip moisturiser before and after mouth care and as required.

If the resident is able, put a small pea-size amount of lip moisturiser on the finger and ask him or her to rub it over the lips.

If the resident requires full assistance, apply a small pea-size amount of lip moisturiser to your gloved finger or use a swab and rub it over the lips.

Caution

Petroleum-based lip moisturisers may increase the risk of inflammation and aspiration pneumonia and are contraindicated during oxygen therapy.

Never place your fingers between the teeth of a resident.

Protect Oral Tissue



Take care when choosing oral care products as some ingredients, in particular alcohol, can dry out the mouth and damage oral tissue.

Pineapple, lemon and other citric juices may over-stimulate and exhaust the salivary glands causing the dry mouth condition to worsen.

Dry mouth products are recommended and are particularly soothing for residents receiving palliative care.

Caution

Do not use mouthwashes and swabs containing the following as they may damage oral tissues and may increase the risk of infection:

- alcohol
- hydrogen peroxide
- sodium bicarbonate (high-strength)
- lemon and glycerine.

Application Techniques for Saliva Substitutes



Resident Self Application

Before you start, ask the resident to have a drink of water or rinse the mouth with water before applying the dry mouth gel.

If the resident is able, put a small pea-size amount of gel on the finger and ask him or her to rub it over the teeth and gums.

If the resident has dentures, remove and rinse the dentures, apply a small pea-size amount of gel to the gums, and replace dentures.

Alternatively, the gel can be applied to the fitting side of the denture.

Use a Toothbrush to Wipe over Teeth

If the resident requires full assistance, apply a small pea-size amount of dry mouth gel to a toothbrush and wipe over the teeth and gums.

Use a Spray Bottle

If it is difficult to apply a gel, an alternative is to use a dry mouth spray.

Follow the manufacturer's instructions.

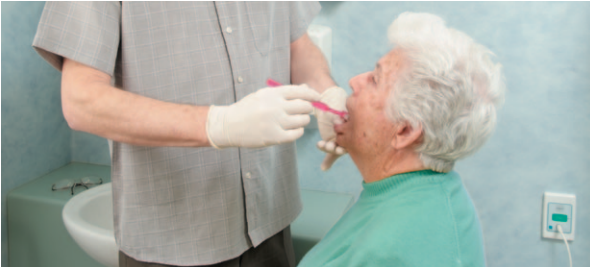
Take care not to spray the resident's face.

If appropriate, a backward bent toothbrush can also be used to retract the cheek, so you can gain greater access as you spray the mouth.

Caution

Never place your fingers between the teeth of a resident.

Positioning



When the resident requires assistance, try different approaches or different positions to suit the situation.

Standing in Front Position

Sit the resident in a chair facing you.

If the resident is in bed you will need to support the resident's head with pillows.

Support the resident's chin with your index finger and thumb, being careful not to place pressure on the resident'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 resident is maintained with this position.

Cuddle Position

Stand behind and to the side of the resident.

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

Support the resident's chin with your index finger and thumb, being careful not to place pressure on the resident'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.

Toothbrush Care after Application of Saliva Substitutes



After use, 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.

Refusal of Oral Care

Refer to Module 1 for more information on how to manage oral care and changed behaviour.

Check Daily, Document and Report to RN

If saliva substitutes have not been given as per the oral health care plan, document this and report it to the RN.