

Oral Care in Nursing Homes

There is growing concern of a need for assurance of oral health being provided in nursing homes, particularly in rural America. Oral health impacts physical, psychological and social well-being through pain, diminished function and decreased quality of life. Poor oral health increases atherosclerosis vascular disease among people with chronic periodontitis and dental disease affects pulmonary health (specifically COPD and pneumonia). Some studies find that nursing home residents receive oral care lasting 1.25 minutes, but adequate care requires 6 minutes to brush, floss, and clean to maintain oral care.

Only two federal citations address oral health, and those address emergency dental services in nursing homes. It is known that oral care should be provided by staff as part of quality of care and quality of life; perhaps expanding the resident’s care plan related to oral care would address specifics of how and when the care and when the care will be provided.

The first step is to determine what the resident is able to do for his/her own daily oral care. The next step is to create the resident-specific care plan for oral care. Examples can include the following steps:

Oral Care for Residents

Self-Oral Care	Assisted Oral Care	Self-Denture Care	Assisted Denture Care
Provide toothbrush	Assist resident to perform as much oral care as possible	Ensure resident has supplies to clean dentures	Place washcloth in sink to avoid breaking dentures and drain denture cleaner
Provide toothpaste	Put toothpaste on toothbrush and place resident’s hand on toothbrush to encourage brushing	Place washcloth in sink with plunger open to drain denture cleaner and avoid breakage of dentures	Clean dentures in sink – brush dentures for at least five minutes
Provide floss	Brush teeth for approximately 6 minutes	Resident brushes dentures	Observe for any cracks or broken edges on dentures

Self-Oral Care	Assisted Oral Care	Self-Denture Care	Assisted Denture Care
Provide dental picks	Rinse toothbrush	Inspect resident's gums and tongue for any sign of bleeding or soreness and document same (notify nurse if bleeding or soreness noted)	Inspect resident's gums and tongue for any sign of bleeding or soreness and document same (notify nurse if bleeding or soreness noted)
Provide glass with water for rinsing	Bring floss to teeth and help resident to floss as able	Resident uses mouthwash	Encourage resident to rinse with mouthwash and spit before replacing dentures
Provide mouthwash	Give resident water to rinse mouth and spit into mouth tray	Resident returns dentures to mouth or to cup if not replacing immediately	Replace dentures in resident's mouth, or in cup if not replacing immediately (i.e., bedtime)
Encourage to brush and floss for approximately 6 minutes and rinse with mouthwash for 1-2 minutes	Provide mouthwash and encourage to swish in mouth and spit out		

Having care plans in place for oral care, including the frequency, will help to ensure it is being carried out by either the resident or staff.

Resources:

www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/5-2019

National Library of Medicine 9-19-19 Oral Health Screening Survey, Florence Italy 'Older People in Nursing Homes