

## When doing oral care becomes difficult

Older adults who are having difficulty either remembering to do or actually doing their oral care, need to be encouraged to do as much of their oral care as possible and have help when they can't do it.

When helping an older adult, always describe to them what you want them to do or what you will be doing, like brushing their teeth.

Talk them through each oral care step, from opening their mouth, brushing of their teeth, no biting on the toothbrush or swallowing toothpaste to spitting it out in the sink.

Massage the cheeks to relax the muscles as this encourages opening of the mouth.

If the older adult is refusing oral care, think about possible mouth pain, infection, fear of oral care or loose teeth in the mouth.

Only place your fingers inside the cheeks or lips, never between the teeth.

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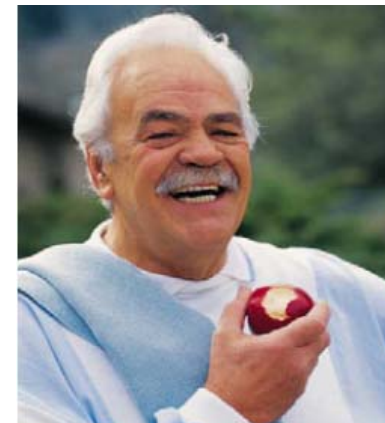
### Collaborators



**More resources for download at these Websites**  
[www.rgpc.ca](http://www.rgpc.ca) and [www.halton.ca](http://www.halton.ca)

## Primary Care For Caregivers

## Oral Care Strategies for Older Adults with Dementia, Responsive Behaviours, Communication and/or Functional Impairments



# Oral Care Strategies for Older Adults with Dementia, Responsive Behaviours, Communication and/or Functional Impairments

## Some oral care problems that can happen

### Problems Getting in the Mouth

#### Sometimes the older adult,

- \* Refuses oral care
- \* Won't open their mouth
- \* Has problems getting dentures in/out
- \* Bites down on their toothbrush
- \* Can't rinse their mouth or spit out
- \* Swallows toothpaste
- \* Has swallowing difficulties

### Problems with Responsive Behaviours

#### Doing oral care can be even more difficult because they may

- \* Push you away
- \* Turns their head away
- \* Move or walk away
- \* Hit, punch, kick
- \* Bite the toothbrush or fingers
- \* Spit
- \* Swear



### Problems with Communication, Cognition and Functional Issues

#### Other problems may be that the older adult,

- \* Doesn't understand your directions
- \* Forgets to do their oral care
- \* Doesn't remember how to do their oral care
- \* Can do some but not all of their oral care
- \* Has poor attention or is sleepy
- \* Moves their head or face downward in an awkward position

## Basic oral care—some tips

Oral care should be completed at least 2x each day. Use a toothbrush with a small head, soft bristles, a large handle with rubberized grip.

Only use a pea-sized amount of toothpaste.

Never use toothpaste or mouth rinses if the older adult has swallowing difficulties—use water only.

Always brush the inside of the mouth, gums, tissues and tongue with a soft bristled toothbrush.

Replace toothbrushes every 3 months and after any oral or chest infection.



Remove dentures daily, usually overnight or for at least 3 hours for the gums to rest. Clean dentures with denture paste and a denture brush, and then soak them in cool water.

Never use denture tablets for older adults with dementia as swallowing of tablets or solution is serious.

## Special strategies that can be used while doing oral care

**Distraction:** the use of singing, holding items, gentle touch and talking to the older adult distracts them while you're doing their oral care.

**Hand-over-hand:** place your hand over the older adult's hand to guide them through brushing their teeth, mouth and/or dentures.



## Other ideas for doing oral care

Try one of the special strategies listed below.

Provide oral care when a second care giver is available to assist you. It may be easier to do the oral care with 2 people.

Give clear and simple instructions and break down the oral care tasks into many small steps, prompting and encouraging them through each step. Finish each step before going on to the next step.

Create and post reminders for the older adult to do their oral care, such as a note on the bathroom mirror.

Do oral care when they are awake, cooperative and not tired.

Contact oral health professionals or occupational therapists to determine the most appropriate adaptive toothbrushes and oral care devices.

**Task breakdown:** the activity or task is broken down into steps. Complete one step before starting the next step, keep it simple and clear.

**Bridging:** have the older adult hold a second toothbrush while you brush the teeth, it helps them connect with what you're doing.

**Chaining:** you start the oral care and ask the older adult to continue and complete it.

**Rescuing:** a second person enters the room and offers to "help" the older adult and you hand-off the oral care to the second person, sometimes a new person changes things and the oral care gets done