

# Dental and Oral Health Concerns

# Dysphagia

(difficulty swallowing)



Dysphagia means difficulty swallowing and is most often caused by neurological diseases such as stroke, depression and dementia. There is an increased risk of developing pneumonia with dysphagia, therefore, additional support and modifications are required during oral care routines.

## Daily Dental Care Tips

Individuals with dysphagia often inhale contents in the mouth instead of swallowing them. To prevent this, follow these tips:

- If the individual is sitting upright, tuck the chin down prior to oral care. This will prevent any liquid from pooling in the back of the throat. If the individual is bedridden, raise the bed to a 90 degree angle, tuck the chin down, and turn the head to the side.
- Individuals with dysphagia often “pocket” food in their cheeks, therefore, remove any food left in their mouth with the corner of a soft moistened cloth prior to brushing.
- Do not use toothpaste or mouthwash. Only slightly moisten the toothbrush with water.
- A slightly damp washcloth can be used during brushing to clear any debris or saliva from the mouth.

## For Natural Teeth:

- Brush teeth twice a day.
- Floss teeth once a day.
- Clean cheeks, tongue and roof of the mouth with a soft toothbrush daily.

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### Visits to the Dental Professional:

- Make sure the dental professional is aware of the dysphagia; dental treatment can be modified.

### Daily Denture Care:

- Dentures must be cleaned daily as bacteria found in the dental plaque can easily be inhaled by a person with dysphagia.
- Place a face cloth in the sink to prevent breakage if the denture is dropped.
- Clean cheeks, tongue and roof of the mouth with a soft toothbrush at least once a day.
- Regularly monitor the dentures for fit. Decreased muscle function from dysphagia puts the individual at an increased risk for swallowing their dentures.
- Dentures should be labelled with the owner's name. A dentist or denturist can provide this service.

### Did you know?

Oral cancer is found in 2-3% of the Canadian population. A dentist or physician should check the mouth annually for cancer.

For more information about dental health, please call

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