

Mouth care in hospital

Nursing and Patients Experience



Patient information leaflet

This leaflet aims to provide useful information on the importance of mouth care to all patients during their stay in hospital.

Why is it important to look after my mouth?

A clean, comfortable mouth is essential for good physical health and general quality of life. An unclean mouth leads to development of plaque and debris on teeth and gums. Good mouth care is important to reduce the risk of developing plaque, gum disease, sore mouth and mouth ulcers and to reduce the risk of developing infections elsewhere in the body. Poor health and poor oral health are linked to general health and chronic systemic disease (Winning et al 2015).

What can I do to keep my mouth clean during my stay in hospital?

- Ensure you have teeth cleaning products.
- Report any existing oral conditions to the staff.
- Report any concerns/worries/fears you may have about checking or cleaning your mouth.
- Ensure you clean your mouth a minimum of two times a day or as recommended by your team. Please ask if you need any help.

What should I expect with regards to oral assessment if I am admitted into hospital?

- Nurses will ask relevant information about your general health and oral health.
- The nurses will check your mouth using a torch and record their findings in your notes on admission and then weekly.
- Nurses will ask you or assist you to remove dentures, if you have any to examine your mouth properly.

What can I use to clean my mouth in hospital?

You can bring or ask a relative or carer to bring your own toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste along with other toiletries in to hospital. Ask your ward nursing team if you do not have access to your own products. Ideally you should use a small headed, soft bristled (manual or powered) tooth brush to clean your teeth.

What is fluoride?

Fluoride is a natural mineral that found in fruits, vegetables, fish and tea. Fluoride strengthens enamel making it resistant to tooth decay.

How much fluoride is enough?

A range of toothpaste is available that contain different levels of fluoride. The amount of fluoride in the tooth paste can be found on the side of the tube and is measured in parts per million (ppm) (NHS Choices, 2015). Adults should use a toothpaste containing 1350ppm fluoride (PHE, 2014). A higher concentration of fluoride may be prescribed by the dentist for those at higher risk of developing dental caries.

How often should I clean my teeth during my stay in hospital?

Teeth should be cleaned once anytime during day and before bed time. Mouth care routine will depend on the treatment you are having in hospital. For example: If you are having chemotherapy or radiotherapy you should clean your teeth four times a day. Ask your nursing team for mouth care information specific to patients receiving cancer treatment - 'Good mouth care' during and after your treatment (PIN170317-1223).

What if I am not able to walk to the bathroom to clean my teeth?

Staff will be able to assist or provide you with a bowl, a cup of water and a towel.

What if I am unable to clean my mouth?

A member of the nursing team will be able to assist you to clean your mouth. Alternatively you can ask a family member or carer to help during their visit if they are willing to.

What is the common mouth problem that occurs during hospitalisation?

A dry mouth is a commonly reported problem whilst in hospital. There are many reasons why you may have a dry mouth. These include medication, oxygen, nil by mouth, dehydration, underlying medical conditions and open mouth breathing. You must inform your doctor or nurse if you experience any abnormalities such as non-healing ulcers, lumps, pain, unexplained bleeding or white or red patches in your mouth.

What if I have dentures?

Whether you have natural teeth, no teeth, dentures or implants you should continue to care for your mouth.

- Dentures must be cleaned after every meal to prevent food getting trapped under them. Rinse your mouth thoroughly after eating if this is not possible.
- Remove Fixodent from dentures as well as gums/palate as part of cleaning your mouth. Brush your gums, tongue and palate gently with a soft toothbrush.
- Only use a thin smear of Fixodent (if used) to fix dentures in your mouth.
- Always follow manufacturer's guidance on using denture cleaning products.
- Remove your dentures at night to rest your gums.
- Soak your dentures overnight in clean tap water in a named denture pot. These can be provided by the hospital if needed.

How do I check my mouth?

Your mouth can be examined using the guide below with the help of a mirror. Any abnormalities such as red or white patches or an ulcer of more than 2 weeks should be seen by a dentist or doctor.



How to keep my mouth healthy?

- Brush teeth and gums twice daily with a fluoride toothpaste. 'Spit, excess toothpaste don't rinse' to allow fluoride action on teeth.
- Brush your gums, tongue and roof of your mouth with a soft tooth brush to keep your mouth healthy.
- Check your mouth regularly and consult your dentist or your doctor if you experience any problems or abnormalities. E.g. ulcers which have not healed within 2 weeks, unexplained bleeding, lump in mouth/lips/tongue, red or white patches in the mouth.
- Keep sugary snacks and drinks to meals times or limit snacking between meals if possible to help reduce tooth decay.
- Ideally, sugar should not be added to foods or drinks.
- Consider low sugar/sugar free medications.
- Have regular dental check-ups. Visit your dentist regardless of whether you have natural teeth or you wear dentures.
- Use mouth wash at a different time to brushing.
- Stop smoking and limit alcohol intake.
- Include dairy, fresh fruits, vegetables and water in your diet.
- Any ulcer that lasts for more than two weeks needs to be checked by your dentist regardless of whether you have natural teeth or not.
- Change your toothbrush every 3 months or sooner if bristles are worn out. It is also important to replace your toothbrush after any oral infection.
- Poorly fitted dentures can cause discomfort and can lead to mouth ulcers, infections or problem with eating and drinking. Visit your dentist as soon as possible (NHS Choices, 2015).

What if I am worried about visiting a Dentist?

Speak to your Dentist about your worries or fears so that they can support you or direct you to specialists in the area. You can also contact Dental helpline on **0178 8 5539780** or visit **www.dentalhealth.org/dental-helpline**

For more information on fear of dentist follow the link below:
www.nhs.uk/Livewell/dentalhealth/Pages/Fearofthedentist.aspx

References

NHS Choices (2015), Dentures (false teeth)

www.nhs.uk/conditions/dentures/Pages/Introduction.aspx

Public Health England (PHE, 2014) Delivering better oral health: an evidence based toolkit for prevention.

www.gov.uk/government/publications/delivering-better-oral-health-an-evidence-based-toolkit-for-prevention accessed on 10/05/2017

Winning L., Linden G.J (2015) Periodontitis and systemic disease, BDJ Team article number 2015163.

Contact details

Clinical Quality Standards Nurse

Telephone: 01483 571122 **ext** 4993

PALS and Advocacy contact details

Contact details of independent advocacy services can be provided by our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) who are located on the right hand side as you enter the main reception area. PALS are also your first point of contact for health related issues, questions or concerns surrounding RSCH patient services.

Telephone: 01483 402757

Email: rsc-tr.pals@nhs.net

Opening hours: 9.00am–3.00pm, Monday to Friday

If you would like information documents in large print, on tape or in another language or form please contact PALS.

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Author: Sreela Cheerassery

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