



Oral Health Care After Stroke



Maintain Good Oral Health After Stroke to Prevent Complications



Oral care after a stroke is crucial to maintain good oral health and prevent complications like pneumonia and gum disease. Stroke can affect cognitive and physical capacities that make it a challenge for a person to complete oral hygiene self-care. Proper training, support and use of adaptive devices can help stroke survivors to maintain good oral health.

Stroke-Related Oral Health Complications

Dysphagia	If a stroke survivor has difficulty swallowing, a consult should be ordered for a speech therapist to perform a swallow test to determine the best strategies for implementing oral care. Taking smaller bites and sips, pausing in between brushing and taking sips, making sure toothpaste and water are swallowed before continuing with the next step of oral care are essential.
Xerostomia	Xerostomia (dry mouth) increases the risk of cavities, gum disease, oral infections, difficulty speaking and eating, and overall discomfort. If a stroke survivor has a dry mouth, it is important to keep it moist using saliva sprays or gels.
Cognitive Impairment	Interventions like reminders and structured routines for completing oral hygiene can help people with memory problems to maintain oral care.

Key Aspects of Providing Oral Care

Assisting with Oral Hygiene

If a person has difficulty with brushing or flossing, caregivers can assist by standing behind them and gently guiding the toothbrush or floss. A consult with an Occupational Therapist can be very helpful because they have adaptive devices and training strategies that can make completing oral hygiene self-care much more effective.

Adapting Oral Care Tools

Specialized toothbrushes with suction devices can be used by individuals with swallowing problems. Toothbrushes with circular handles can be obtained that can be grasped by a hand with limited strength. Powered toothbrushes can be easier to use than manual ones for persons with limited dexterity.



Poor oral health can lead to pain, tooth loss, and difficulty eating or speaking, which can interfere with rehabilitation, nutrition, and quality of life for stroke survivors.

Modifying Food & Beverage Intake

Using modified textures of food is important ranging from solid to puree depending on the person's level of dysphagia. When stroke survivors have residual facial weakness or paralysis, it is usually one sided. This increases the likelihood that food will remain in the mouth, usually on the affected side and pouched in the cheek. This provides a medium for oral bacteria to collect and potentially be aspirated and contribute to development of pneumonia and other oral and systemic infections. Avoiding sugary drinks and snacks can help prevent tooth decay. Chlorhexidine mouth rinse can help reduce plaque and bacteria in the mouth as well as reduce the likelihood of halitosis.

Getting Regular Dental Check-ups & Care

Regular dental check-ups and cleanings can help to prevent dental problems. Improved oral health can help people feel more confident and comfortable communicating and participating in social situations.

Regular oral care is essential to protect stroke survivors from infections, support their recovery, and promote overall health.



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