

QUICK TIPS

Oral Care Ideas for Someone with Advanced Dementia

Assisting people with advanced dementia with oral care requires a compassionate and patient approach, as cognitive decline may make it difficult for them to understand or cooperate.

Here are some practical recommendations that you can try:

1. Create a Calm and Comfortable Environment

- Use a quiet, familiar setting to reduce anxiety.
- Approach the person with a calm tone and friendly body language.
- Explain each step of the process clearly, even if they may not fully understand.

2. Use Nonverbal Cues

- Demonstrate brushing on yourself or mimic the action to encourage cooperation.
- Use gentle hand-under-hand guidance if they struggle to understand.
- Use gentle hand-over-hand guidance if they struggle to hold the toothbrush.

3. Choose the Right Tools

- Use a soft-bristled toothbrush or an electric toothbrush with a small head.
- A long-handled toothbrush may help you reach their teeth more easily if they resist opening wide.
- Consider fluoride toothpaste with a mild flavor to avoid overwhelming their senses.
- A Toothette (foam oral swab) can be useful if they are unable to tolerate a toothbrush.

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4. Simplify the Process

- Use short, clear instructions throughout the process.
- Break down the task. Use step-by-step instructions such as “Hold your toothbrush.” (Offer it to them with or without the toothpaste depending on their level of ability.) “Put the toothbrush into your mouth.” “Clean your teeth.” “Now spit in the sink”.
- Try helping with cleaning one section of the mouth at a time.
- Provide frequent reassurance and praise during the process.

5. Address Physical Limitations

- If they can’t spit, use a small amount of toothpaste or a non-rinse option to avoid choking.
- Keep a towel or basin or a washcloth handy to manage excess saliva or toothpaste.

6. Check for Discomfort or Mouth Pain

- Watch for signs of pain, such as grimacing or pulling away, which could indicate dental problems.
- Ensure dentures fit properly to avoid discomfort or sores.
- Consult a dentist familiar with dementia care if issues like cavities, infections, or ill-fitting dentures arise.

Reminder: By combining patience, flexibility, and empathy along with the tips above, you can help with maintaining the oral health of individuals with advanced dementia. Reach out should you wish to receive personalized recommendations.