

# Caring for Natural Teeth

*tips for*

## Seniors and Caregivers

Oral hygiene is important to remove harmful bacteria and plaque from the teeth, gums and dentures and to keep the mouth healthy. For seniors and their caregivers, it can be challenging to maintain daily mouth care, but it is important to do as decay and infection can develop quickly. A healthy mouth supports good general health and overall well-being.

*Dental disease is largely preventable with daily mouth care, regular professional cleanings and a yearly examination by a dentist, including for seniors who wear dentures.*

### Supplies for daily mouth care:

- A soft toothbrush
- Fluoride toothpaste and mouth rinse
- Aids to clean between teeth

### Supplies for caregivers:

- Disposable gloves
- A towel or washcloth
- A basin and a cup of water
- A mouth prop, as appropriate

For seniors with natural teeth and a denture, please also refer to the tip sheet *Caring for Dentures*.



*Interproximal brushes can help make it easier for seniors to clean between teeth.*



*Adaptive toothbrushes.*



*Dental supplies.*



## Seniors:

- Brush natural teeth twice a day; especially before bedtime.
- Use a soft toothbrush with a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste.
- An electric or adaptive toothbrush can help seniors with dexterity problems.
- Clean between teeth with floss or an interproximal brush to remove plaque and food debris.
- Visit the dentist regularly.

**Important!** If the gums bleed when brushing continue daily brushing for a week. If bleeding does not stop, contact a dental professional.

## Caregivers:

- Encourage seniors to brush their own teeth and support care where needed.
- Always wear gloves to prevent cross-contamination.
- Remove dentures before brushing.
- Brush in the bathroom, if possible. Always choose a comfortable location.
- Brush around the mouth in sequence to cover all parts of the teeth—the outer, inner and chewing surfaces. Don't forget to brush the tongue.
- Engage the senior in the process—let them know what you are doing as you do it. Ask the senior to tell you if you are brushing too hard or if they are experiencing any pain.
- Have the senior rinse their mouth with warm water when you are done brushing.
- Replace toothbrushes every three months, when worn or following a cold or flu—always store upright in a container.

Visit [yourdentalhealth.ca](http://yourdentalhealth.ca) for more information and to view an online educational video.



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