

DAILY ORAL HYGIENE FOR THE CHILD WITH AUTISM



As a parent or caregiver, you recognize the challenges and day-to-day struggles of maintaining proper oral health for a child with autism. Although every child is different, this guide will offer you some tips and guidance for maintaining daily oral hygiene.

- Parents and caregivers are KEY to the success of a child's good oral health.
- Establish a consistent daily routine for brushing and flossing.
- Be patient - the child may be sensitive to having their mouth touched.
- Approach in a calm, slow manner.
- Holding a favorite toy or item may be calming for the child.

Toothbrush

- Choose a soft bristled toothbrush that is the right size for the child's mouth.
- Multiple-head toothbrushes are available and clean several surfaces of the teeth at one time.
- Consider a power toothbrush which may make brushing easier. Try a less expensive model first, such as battery operated brush.

Toothpaste

- Toothpaste comes in a variety of flavors and textures.
- A small amount of fluoride toothpaste is recommended.
- Some children do not tolerate the use of toothpaste (plaque can be removed by using a wet toothbrush).

Positioning Tips

- Find a comfortable and relaxing location which addresses the child's sensory needs (light, sound, etc.) It doesn't have to be the bathroom – a different room may be more appropriate.
- Allow the child to stand, sit or lie down for comfort.
- If standing or sitting, approach from behind and gently tip the child's head back.
- When reclining, have the child's head placed in your lap.

Tell-Show-Do (Preparation)

- Explain and demonstrate each step.
- Consider using a picture schedule.
- Allow the child time to become at ease with the toothbrush in his/her hand
- Guide the child's hand to the outside of the mouth and gently touch the lips.

Brushing Tips

- Brush at least twice a day, especially before bedtime.
- Assist the child in brushing all three sides of the teeth (outside, inside, and chewing surfaces)
- Brush along the gumline using a gentle, circular motion.

Flossing Tips

- Flossing can be difficult and challenging for everyone.
- There are many types of floss – waxed, unwaxed and flavored. Waxed floss may slide through easier without fraying or breaking.
- Ease the floss gently between two teeth until it reaches the gumline.
- Wrap the floss in a “C” shape and move it up and down.
- Flossers or holders may make flossing easier.

Tips for Success

- Give praise and encouragement for each step.
- Transition – slowly let the child take over each brushing and flossing step. Offer help if the child is having difficulties.
- The child may not be able to complete all the steps. This process may take days, weeks, or months.
- Use a timer so the child can see when the task will be over.
- Offer rewards for completed tasks such as stickers or tokens.

Resources:

National Museum of Dentistry - http://dentaletc.umaryland.edu/odar/health_smiles_for_autism.pdf

Autism Speaks - <https://www.autismspeaks.org/sites/default/files/documents/dentalguide.pdf>