

Maintaining oral health following a spinal cord injury



Information for patients

Community and Special Care Dentistry



PROUD TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

SHEFFIELD TEACHING HOSPITALS NHS FOUNDATION TRUST



Why is good oral health important?

Good oral health is important for everybody; this includes people with no teeth, those who wear dentures and people who are tube fed.

A clean, comfortable mouth is essential for good physical health and general quality of life.

Poor oral health and hygiene can lead to increased bacteria and infections in the mouth. This can lead to ill health.

How should I maintain good oral health?

Brush teeth twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste for 2 minutes

- Fluoride toothpaste should contain at least 1350ppm fluoride, check the fluoride content in the toothpaste ingredients.
- Brush last thing at night and at one other time.
- Spit out after brushing, do not rinse with water after brushing.
- Clean in between teeth to below the gum line daily before brushing teeth:
 - for small spaces use floss.
 - for larger spaces use interdental brushes.
- A dentist may recommend using daily fluoride mouth rinse at a different time to tooth brushing.
- Use a manual or electric toothbrush.
- The toothbrush must have a small head and medium texture bristles.
- Effective daily tooth brushing is more important to maintain oral health than professional dental scaling and polishing.

Avoid sugary foods and drinks in between meal times

- In between meals choose low sugar drinks and foods such as water, milk, fruit and vegetables.
- Be aware that many foods contain hidden sugars; therefore it is advisable to check the ingredients for sugar content.
- Request sugar free medications when possible.

Do not smoke or use smokeless tobacco

- Smoking increases the risk of developing oral cancer and precancerous lesions.
- Smoking increases risk of gum disease and tooth loss.
- Smoking stains teeth.
- Smoking causes bad breath.

Do not exceed recommended amounts of alcohol

- All adults: you are safest not to drink regularly more than 14 units per week
- 1 unit = 25ml of spirit, half a pint of ordinary strength beer, lager or cider, half a glass (87.5ml) of wine
- High alcohol consumption increases the risk of developing oral cancer

Visit the dentist regularly

- Everyone should see a dentist at least once a year.
- People who visit a dentist regularly have less dental pain.

What type of toothbrush should I use?

Following a spinal cord injury, manual dexterity to control a toothbrush may be reduced.

Electric toothbrushes are often beneficial due to their wider handles for gripping and oscillating movements to maintain the brushing technique.

Manual toothbrushes can also be adapted if necessary.



If independent brushing is not ideal we recommend **assisted brushing** at bedtime.

Assisted brushing

1. Explain to the person that you are going to clean their teeth.
2. Wash your hands and put gloves and eye protection on (if appropriate).
3. Place a towel around the person's collar.
4. Ideally stand behind the person when brushing their teeth, as this appears less invasive.
 - Some people with spinal cord injuries are not able to lean back, therefore they must be approached from the front for tooth brushing.
 - If a person is in a moveable bed, pull the bed away from the wall to stand behind them for tooth brushing.
 - Some people will prefer to sit in front of a mirror so that they can watch their teeth being brushed
5. Place a small pea size amount of toothpaste on the toothbrush and ensure all surfaces of the teeth are brushed for a total of 2 minutes.
6. Follow a routine, for example:
 - brush the outside of all the top teeth
 - brush the outside of all the bottom teeth
 - brush the top and bottom biting surfaces
 - brush the inside of the top teeth
 - brush the inside of the bottom teeth
7. Following brushing encourage the person to spit out. No rinsing is necessary after toothbrushing, therefore the person does not need to be by a sink.

How do I find an NHS dentist?

1. Ask family and friends for recommendations.
2. Call 111 NHS helpline. Give the operator your postcode and any requirements such as wheelchair access and they will be able to give you the contact details for NHS dental practices with vacancies in your local area.
3. Visit the **NHS choices website: www.nhs.uk**

Click on the tab titled: 'Services near you' and type in your details

Find: Dentists

Location: Your postcode

A list of dentists in your area will appear. Those accepting new patients will be clearly highlighted.

Click on the Dentist name and address to get the full details

Click on the facilities tab to see the accessibility of the practice, including wheelchair access and disabled toilet facilities.

4. If you are unable to leave the house, a dentist can visit you at your home as part of a domiciliary service. Domiciliary care is often provided by the local community dental services.

You can find the contact details for your local community dental service by:

- a. Calling the 111 NHS helpline
- b. Visiting the NHS choices website: **www.nhs.uk**

Click on the tab titled: 'Services near you' and type in your details

Find: Community dentists

Location: Your postcode

Who is entitled to free NHS dental treatment in England?

You do not need to pay for NHS dental treatment if you are:

- Under 18
- Under 19 and in full time education
- Pregnant or you have had a baby in the previous 12 months
- Staying in an NHS hospital and the hospital dentist carries out your treatment
- Included in an award of:
 - Income Support
 - Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
 - Income related Employment and Support Allowance
 - Pension Credit Guarantee Credit
- Named on a valid NHS tax credit exemption certificate - HC2 certificate

Note: if you are named on a valid HC3 certificate you may not have to pay the full NHS dental charges, however you will pay a contribution.



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