Royal United Hospitals Bath
NHS Foundation Trust

Caring for your mouth

A guide for supporting patients with mouth care after a stroke.

Why is mouth care important after a stroke.

After a stroke you may need help and support to look after your mouth and teeth. Good oral hygiene can help you to stay healthy by reducing the bacteria in your mouth. Poor oral hygiene can lead to complications, that include:

- Swallowing problems. due to lung infections (pneumonia) caused by breathing in the bacteria from your mouth.
- Changes to taste and smell: a bacterial infection or thrush can lead to a bad taste in your mouth, which can put you off eating.
- Tooth decay and gum infections. These can make your mouth sore making it more difficult to eat and drink. regular cleaning will reduce this risk.

Using a toothbrush to clean your teeth. Try to brush your teeth twice a day, in the morning and again before going to sleep at night. If brushing is sore or painful try a soft child or baby toothbrush, or an ultra-soft toothbrush. If a softer toothbrush is still painful, try some gauze wrapped over your finger. Gently brush the area where the tooth meets the gum and work around every tooth. Start on the upper teeth, gently brushing the outside, inside and biting surfaces, then repeat on the lower teeth. You may find an electric or battery operated toothbrush easier to use. If you find it difficult to hold the toothbrush you can use a foam cover over the handle to improve grip.

Toothpaste Use toothpaste that suits you and contains fluoride as this will help protect your teeth. If the toothpaste burns or stings, try an SLS (sodium lauryl sulphate) free toothpaste.

Dentures If you have dentures clean them twice a day with mild soap and a toothbrush. At the end of the day also soak your dentures in a cleaner for 20 minutes, then rinse well with water. Leave the dentures to dry in a safe place overnight. Dentures should not be worn if they are uncomfortable, rubbing or loose.

Cleaning your tongue and palate Brush your tongue and the roof of your mouth with a soft toothbrush once a day. This will help to prevent a coating building up on the tongue and reduce the risk of developing oral thrush. Not everyone can tolerate brushing the tongue and roof of the mouth.

Food supplements can also increase your chance of developing tooth decay, so clean your teeth or rinse your mouth with water after taking them.

Caring for your lips Keep your lips moist with bee's wax balm or a water based lubricant. This can be applied every 2 to 3 hours to prevent the lips from cracking.

Caring for a dry mouth A dry mouth can develop when you are feeling unwell or taking some medications. The following can help to relieve a dry mouth:

- Drinking water at room temperature
- Sucking sugar free sweets
- Avoiding spicy and acidic foods
- Adding sauces to meals
- Saltwater mouth washes (1 teaspoon of salt in a glass water)
- Water spray – spray your tongue, the cheeks on the inside of your mouth and roof of mouth
- Avoiding alcohol

Saliva replacements. These can be prescribed or bought over the counter. They can relieve the sensation of a dry mouth. They can be a gel or spray. The gel needs to be massaged into the cheeks on the inside of your mouth like a hand cream. It will take a few minutes to rub into the area to get the best effect. It can be massaged into the tongue and palate, if this can be tolerated. You can use a toothbrush to apply and then gently rub onto the areas if you don't want to use your finger.

Regular Dental Appointments are advised so the dentist can help keep your mouth healthy.

Information you may find helpful

NHS guidance on keeping your teeth clean:

https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-teeth-and-gums/how-to-keep-your-teeth-clean/

Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust
Combe Park, Bath, BA1 3NG

01225 428331 | www.ruh.nhs.uk

If you would like this leaflet in email form, large print, braille or another language, please contact the Patient Support and Complaints team on 01225 825656.

Date of publication: June 2025| Ref: RUH ORL010
© Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust

The RUH, where you matter