

Oral (Mouth) Care

As residents approach the end of their lives swallowing becomes difficult and they may no longer be able to clean their own teeth. Poor mouth care can lead to infections and pain and can be very distressful for the resident.

Key messages

- Good mouth care is important for the overall well-being of residents.
- A palliative approach to care includes providing regular oral assessment and really good mouth care.
- Early identification of minor mouth health problems can avoid more serious problems developing.

What can you do?

Careworkers spend the most time with residents, feed them and provide mouth care. You are therefore most likely to notice problems before anyone else. You play a key role in helping residents to maintain good mouth care. The 'see, say, do, write and review' model is a useful guide that may help you.

'See': recognise and assess

- Look inside the resident's mouth for problems at least once a day – e.g. when cleaning their teeth/dentures, and during mouth care.
- Look at the lips, tongue, gums, saliva, teeth, dentures, and overall cleanliness to see if any changes are occurring.

'Say': report your assessment

- Report any problems to the nursing staff – e.g. bad breath, bleeding gums, broken teeth/dentures, plaque, or if the resident is refusing mouth care. Be as clear and detailed as possible.

'Do': manage

- If the resident can still eat and drink, brush their teeth/dentures morning and night and help keep their mouth moist – e.g. by encouraging them to drink water after meals, medications and other drinks or snacks.
- If the resident is not able to feed themselves, clean and/or moisten the mouth, check their lips and, if required, apply a lip moisturiser.

'Write': document your actions

- Write detailed notes in the resident's assessment chart/clinical record, if that is part of your role.

'Review': evaluate and reassess as necessary

- Review your actions. Did they help? If 'yes', keep doing them regularly. If 'no', tell the nursing staff.

Why it works

- Early identification of minor mouth health problems can avoid more serious mouth problems developing.
- Regular mouth care helps to keep the resident comfortable and supports best possible care.

Related pages

[Clinical Care Domains](#) – clicking here will open a printable version of a flipchart that gives an introduction to oral care (see pages 63-78).

[Self-Directed Learning Package \[Careworker\]](#) – clicking here will open a printable version of the package that provides information on oral care and the role of the careworker (see pages 145-8).

[Self-Directed Learning Package for Careworkers](#) – clicking here will take you to an online version of the package.

[See, Say, Do, Write and Review: Five Key Actions for Careworkers to Support Residents](#) – clicking here will take you to a video (13 minutes) that demonstrates the 'see, say, do, write and review' model.

Relevant link

Residential Aged Care Palliative Approach Toolkit – www.caresearch.com.au/PAToolkit

