

Mouth Care

● SKILL SNAPSHOT

Purpose

- Maintains oral cleanliness, moisture, comfort, mucosal integrity, and reduces infection/aspiration risk.

When to use

- Routine care and more frequently with NPO status, oxygen therapy, fever, dehydration, oral lesions, dentures, or impaired self-care.

Supplies needed

- Soft toothbrush; fluoride toothpaste; basin; towels; water/saline; suction toothbrush/setup if needed; moisturizer; denture supplies; PPE.

● PREP + PATIENT SETUP

- Assess consciousness, gag/swallow, aspiration risk, mucosa, teeth, tongue, lips, saliva, lesions, bleeding, odor, and dentures.
- Determine ability to self-care and need for suction/assistance.

● VAULT TIP

- For aspiration-risk patients, control fluid first: side-lying, small amounts, and suction ready.

● STEP-BY-STEP

1. Hand hygiene; identify patient; apply gloves and protect clothing/bed.
2. For an alert patient, position upright and encourage as much independent care as possible.
3. For impaired consciousness, position side-lying with head turned and use suction; never pour fluid into the mouth.
4. Remove dentures carefully over a towel/basin; store in labeled denture cup when not worn.
5. Brush teeth at gum line and all surfaces with a soft brush and small toothpaste amount.
6. Brush tongue and palate gently from back to front while avoiding gagging.
7. Use suction continuously or intermittently for a patient unable to spit; remove pooled secretions.
8. Rinse with water or prescribed solution when safe. Avoid alcohol-based products when mucosa is dry or irritated.
9. Floss only when appropriate and not contraindicated by severe thrombocytopenia, bleeding risk, or mucosal injury.
10. Clean dentures with cool/tepid water and denture brush; rinse before reinsertion. Never use hot water.
11. Moisturize lips with an oxygen-compatible product; avoid petroleum products around oxygen.
12. Reassess mucosa, bleeding, pain, dryness, secretions, and breath. Clean equipment and remove gloves; perform hand hygiene.

● SAFETY REMINDERS

- Use suction and side-lying positioning for high aspiration risk.
- Foam swabs do not replace toothbrushing for plaque removal.
- Avoid lemon-glycerin/alcohol products that worsen dryness.
- Never use petroleum products with oxygen.

● COMMON MISTAKES

- Leaving unconscious patient supine.
- Using too much fluid.
- Skipping tongue/gumline.
- Storing unlabeled dentures in tissue.

● DOCUMENTATION

- Oral/mucosal assessment and pain.
- Care performed and products used.
- Dentures removed/reinserted/stored.
- Bleeding, lesions, secretions, tolerance.
- Teaching and referrals/notifications.