



Mouthcare at the End of Life: Ensuring Comfort, Cleanliness and Dignity

Information for patients, carers and families

At the end of life, mouthcare becomes an important part of maintaining comfort and dignity. As people become more fatigued and unwell, they may need extra support with their oral care. The following provides simple steps to help care for the mouth during this sensitive time.

Why Mouthcare is Important

- **Promotes Comfort & Dignity:** Regular mouthcare helps keep the mouth clean, comfortable, and moist, which can reduce discomfort and prevent infections.
- **Prevents Dryness & Soreness:** People may breathe through their mouths more as their condition deteriorates, leading to dryness, discomfort, and soreness. Simple mouthcare can relieve this.

Mouthcare Tips for Comfort

- **Using a Soft Toothbrush:** A soft toothbrush with a small amount of low-foaming, Sodium Lauryl Sulphate (SLS)-free toothpaste (e.g., Oralieve) can help gently clean the teeth and mouth. This promotes comfort and reduces irritation.
- **For Drowsy or Unconscious Patients:** If the person is drowsy, unconscious, or unable to swallow, it is important to provide mouthcare more frequently - every 1-2 hours if needed. Regular care prevents the mouth from becoming dry or uncomfortable.
- **Moistening the Mouth:** A circular mouth brush, like a Moutheze brush, can be used to apply a moisturizing oral gel (e.g., Oralieve or Bioextra) to the inside of the cheeks, tongue, and roof of the mouth. Gently massage the gel in a circular motion from front to back, ensuring it is fully absorbed. This helps keep the mouth hydrated and comfortable.

- **Removing Food and Debris:** The circular brush can also be used to gently remove any food particles, debris, or dry saliva that may build up in the mouth. A pen torch can help you check the mouth thoroughly.

Caring for Dry Lips

- **Moisturising Lips:** To prevent dryness and cracking, apply a water-based balm, such as Oralieve or beeswax lip balm, to keep the lips moist. Avoid petroleum-based products, as they can be a fire hazard when used around oxygen or open flames.

Caring for Dentures

- **Cleaning Dentures:** If the person wears dentures, remove them regularly to clean and rinse thoroughly. If the person is drowsy or unconscious, consider leaving the dentures out for their comfort.

Additional Tips for Mouthcare

- **Use a Towel for Protection:** Place a clean towel over the person's clothing to keep them dry during mouthcare.
- **Check Frequently:** Look for signs of dryness, soreness, or buildup in the mouth, and offer care as often as needed.

Supporting Dignity at a Sensitive Time

Providing mouthcare is a small but important way to maintain comfort, cleanliness, and dignity during the final stages of life. By following these steps, you can help ensure the person you care for is as comfortable as possible.