

Caregiver Assistance News

“CARING FOR YOU...CARING FOR OTHERS”

Oral Care

Digestion Starts in the Mouth

Older adults can develop tooth decay, particularly if they have receding gums or if they have old fillings that develop cracks and crevices where new cavities can form.

What’s unhealthy for your body is also unhealthy for your mouth. When we eat foods that are high in sugar – as well as starchy foods that get broken down into sugar – the bacteria in your mouth can change those sugars into acids that slowly eat away at your enamel, causing a hole in your tooth. The foods you eat and the way you clean your teeth are the two most important factors influencing whether or not you have cavities. Limit your intake of sugary foods and beverages, and brush at least twice a day with fluoride toothpaste.

It is important to see a dentist regularly – ideally, every six months – so she can check for the first sign of tooth decay. Contact your local dental society to find the names of professionals who have experience working with people with dementia or with elderly patients.

Watch for signs of tooth pain, especially when the person in your care is eating hot or cold foods. Dry mouth as a side effect of a medication may cause tooth decay.



Gum Disease

While poor oral hygiene is a prime cause of gum disease, other risk factors are smoking and diabetes.

The first sign of gum trouble is red, swollen gums or gums that bleed after brushing. Brushing twice a day with a soft toothbrush and flossing is also important to scrape the plaque off the spaces between the teeth.

Note Loss of appetite may be a sign of mouth pain or ill fitting-dentures. Even a person with dentures should regularly visit the dentist to check the soft tissues of the mouth.

Keeping the Mouth Fresh and Clean

Oral care includes cleansing the mouth and gums and the teeth or dentures. While daily dental hygiene is important, it can cause anxiety in some elderly people. To help reduce anxiety, always be patient and explain what you are about to do. When a person refuses to brush his teeth, encourage him to swish and spit out a fluoridated mouthwash rinse.

Steps to Providing Oral Care

1. Gather supplies – latex gloves, a soft toothbrush, toothpaste, baking soda, warm water in a glass, dental floss, and a bowl.
2. Bring the person to an upright position.
3. Encourage the person to clean his own teeth twice daily and after meals.
4. Be sure the person can spit out water before allowing him to sip it. Use a water glass for rinsing.
5. If necessary, ask the person to open his mouth and gently brush the front and back teeth up and down.
6. Rinse well by having him sip water and spit into a bowl.



Oral Injuries/Teeth

A person with a mouth injury may have knocked-out teeth, broken or loose teeth. This can be a choking hazard. If you suspect an oral injury, immediately take these steps:

1. Put on gloves.
2. Check the mouth for loose teeth, broken teeth or any missing teeth.
3. Rinse the mouth with clean water or saline.
4. If a loose tooth, have the person bite down on a piece of gauze to keep the tooth in place and call the dentist.
5. If tooth is chipped, clean the injured area and call a dentist.
6. If tooth is missing, apply gauze with pressure to stop the bleeding from the empty tooth socket.
7. If tooth has come out, place the tooth in clean water or cup of milk and immediately take the person and tooth to a dentist.
8. Whenever you handle the tooth, it is important to hold the top part or the tooth (the crown) and avoid touching the root of the tooth which may have ligaments on the tooth that will help reattach the tooth.

Denture Cleaning

- ✓ Remove the dentures from the mouth and run them under water and soak them in a cleaner in a denture cup.
- ✓ Rinse the person's mouth with water or mouthwash and stimulate the gums with a very soft brush.
- ✓ Return the dentures to the person's mouth.



Taking Care of Yourself—Alzheimer's Burnout: Are You Suffering From It?

Often caregivers are not even aware that they are suffering from burnout until a friend or family member points out that they are not themselves. Caregivers can underestimate the impact of the work they are doing and the time and emotional energy they are using. Try not to be offended, but listen if you are told that you are more irritable than usual, seem to be losing your temper with the person you are caring for, and do not appear to be doing well.

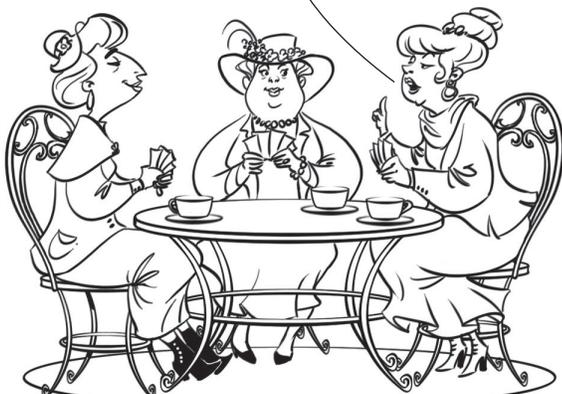
Burnout may have some of the same symptoms as depression but is not the same and cannot be helped with medication. Burnout may explain your loss of interest in activities you used to enjoy, your run-down condition, feelings of hopelessness and helplessness, even wanting to hurt yourself or the person you are caring for. If you have these feelings it is time to re-evaluate your caregiving situation. You should take steps to get more support and relief from the constant responsibility and stress of caring for a person with Alzheimer's disease.

Dementia Oral Care Tips

Good oral hygiene can be a challenge for individuals with Alzheimer's or dementia because of the person's inability to understand and accept help. Use a mirroring technique by holding a brush and show the person how to brush her teeth by copying you.

Live Life Laughing!

I used to be a people-person, but people ruined that for me.



Inspiration

A smile is a light on your face to let someone know you are home.

Don't Fall—Be Safe

Sometimes the safest route is not always the fastest route. Play it safe and avoid steep hills, cracked and icy sidewalks.

The Comfort of Home[®]

Our Purpose

To provide caregivers with critical information enabling them to do their job with confidence, pride, and competence.

Ordering Info

From the publishers of

The Comfort of Home[®]
Caregiver Series

available from...

CareTrust Publications LLC
PO Box 10283, Portland, OR 97296
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SAFETY TIPS—Reduce the Chance of Wandering

Caregivers can do things to reduce the chance that a person with Alzheimer's will wander. Some tips include—

- Provide opportunities for exercise.
- Camouflage doors by painting exit doors the same color as the walls.
- Install electronic alarms or chimes on windows and doors.
- Place a full-length mirror on doors to the outside. Some people will turn around when they see the image.
- Monitor medication changes, especially anti-depressants as they may be making the person agitated and increasing the risk of wandering.
- Determine whether wandering is related to previous lifestyles. (Did the person always react to an argument by going out and walking for an hour? Did he always jog in the afternoon?)
- Have a plan of action if wandering occurs and keep a photo on hand to give the police if an incident occurs.

Alzheimer's Association Safe Return[®] is a 24-hour nationwide emergency response service. Visit www.alz.org for more information.

NEXT ISSUE... PLAN OF CARE