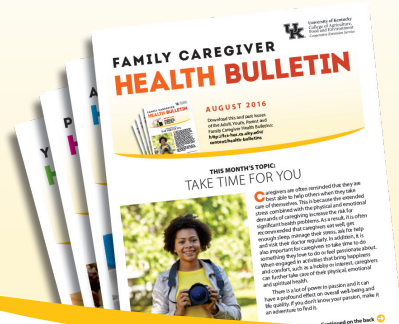




FAMILY CAREGIVER

HEALTH BULLETIN



AUGUST 2018

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<http://fcs-hes.ca.uky.edu/content/health-bulletins>

THIS MONTH'S TOPIC:

CAREGIVING AND ORAL HEALTH



Most people are taught oral health at a young age and taking care of our teeth and gums becomes a life-long habit. But sometimes oral hygiene is neglected in the elder years due in part to conditions such as Alzheimer's disease or other types of dementia or debilitating illnesses associated with aging.

Memory loss and/or disability can affect one's ability to remember oral health and/or properly brush and floss. Certain medications can also affect oral health and increase the risk for tooth decay.

According to the American Dental Association, a healthy mouth and proper oral hygiene is critical not only to dental health, but to overall health. A healthy mouth can also help prevent problems associated with eating, digestion and extensive dental procedures, which can be painful and costly.

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Brush teeth twice a day for two minutes using toothpaste with fluoride.



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Caregivers can help a person who forgets to brush or has trouble brushing. The ADA and Alzheimer's Association suggest the following mouth care steps:

- **Break down the steps into short, simple instructions.** "Hold your toothbrush." "Put toothpaste on the brush." "Brush your teeth with your toothbrush."
- **Model the behavior.** Show the person how to brush by going through the steps and brushing alongside the person.
- **Brush teeth twice a day for two minutes** using toothpaste with fluoride.
- **Floss** or use a between-the-teeth cleaner daily.
- **Monitor daily oral health.** Make sure teeth and/or dentures are being flossed and brushed daily. Make sure dentures are being removed and properly cleaned as well as the gums underneath.
- **Hydrate.** If a person has a dry mouth, give them alcohol-free mouth rinse, encourage water or sucking on ice chips and use a humidifier while sleeping.

- **Limit junk food and sugary drinks.** A healthy diet is also a mouth-healthy diet.
- **Watch for signs of discomfort or ill-fitting dentures.** Signs of discomfort may include grimacing when eating or drinking or refusal to eat.
- **Maintain regular dental visits every six months.** Report concerns to the dentist and ask for advice on how to make oral hygiene easier.

There are a lot of responsibilities when it comes to caregiving. But helping to keep your loved one's mouth healthy is important for their dental health and overall health and well-being, including comfort, safety and self-esteem.

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