

Providing Dental Care for Older Adults in Long Term Care

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Direct Care Staff will be able to:

- 1. Discuss why good dental health promotes overall health and quality of life**
- 2. Describe the potential benefits to nursing care delivery when daily dental care is maintained**
- 3. Discuss plaque bacteria and how prevention can protect the mouth from damage caused by plaque**



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This presentation is designed to educate non-dental health care providers, particularly direct care staff in the provision of mouth care for older persons residing in long-term care facilities.

The module has the following learning objectives:

- Discuss why good dental health promotes overall health and quality of life
- Describe the potential benefits to nursing care delivery when daily dental care is maintained
- Discuss plaque bacteria and how prevention can protect the mouth from damage caused by plaque

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Direct Care Staff will be able to:

4. **Identify ways to control plaque in older persons that are functionally dependent and cognitively impaired**
5. **Identify visible dental problems that should be reported to the nurse or other healthcare provider who might refer to the dentist**



Other learning objectives include:

- Identify ways to control plaque in older persons that are functionally dependent and cognitively impaired
- Identify visible dental problems that should be reported to the nurse or other healthcare provider who might refer to the dentist

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Why is Oral Health Important?

Dental disease is common in the nursing home and homebound population

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- Dental health is important because dental disease and mouth problems are common in the nursing home and homebound population.
- You have probably noticed that many of the persons you care for have problems with their mouths.

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The mouth is a mirror of health and disease

Signs can be seen in the mouth

- Systemic Disease**
- Bacterial and Fungal Infections**
- Nutritional Deficiencies**



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The mouth has been called a mirror of health and disease because there you find:

- signs of systemic diseases,
- microbial infections, and
- nutritional deficiencies.

All can be seen in the mouth.

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Importance of Dental Health to Overall Health and Well-Being

Poor dental health can make other problems worse

- Cardiovascular Disease**
- Diabetes**
- Malnutrition**
- Stroke**
- Pneumonia**



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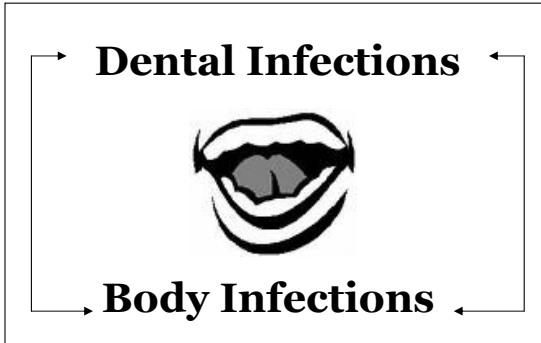
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- Oral health and general health should not be thought of as being separate.
- Cardiovascular disease, diabetes, malnutrition, stroke and pneumonia are common conditions in many of the patients you care for. Poor oral health can make these medical problems worse because of the increased bacteria in the mouth that spread to other systems of the body.

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Importance of Dental Health to Overall Health and Well-Being

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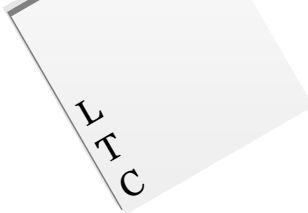
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- Infections in the mouth can lead to infections in other parts of the body.
- Because of their compromised medical health, older adults in long term care are more at risk for infections.
- Good oral health is important and contributes to keeping older persons as healthy as possible.

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Importance of Dental Health to Well-being and Quality of Life



Consequences of Poor Oral Health

- Poor self-esteem**
- Decreased social interaction**
- Problems with eating**
- Problems with sleeping**
- Problems with speech**
- Mouth pain**

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- Dental health is not only related to physical health, but also oral health is related to well-being and quality of life.
- The consequences of poor oral health can drastically alter the way a person acts and how a person lives.
- Imagine a person with ugly appearing teeth or dentures. They may not feel good about the way they look and feel people want to avoid them. They don't want to smile or interact with others and have poor self-esteem.
- Imagine a person with dental pain and not being able to eat or sleep.

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Common Dental Problems Seen in Long Term Care

- Gum Disease**
- Dental Cavities**
- Sores in the Mouth**
- Ill-fitting Dentures**
- Little Saliva**



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- The most common mouth problems are gum disease, dental cavities, sores in the mouth, bad fitting dentures, and little saliva.
- Let's talk a little more about dry mouth because many of the persons you care for may have this problem.

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Special Problems of Dry Mouth

Increase risk of dental cavities, gum disease and infection

- Difficulty eating**
- Difficulty swallowing**
- Difficulty speaking**
- Altered taste**
- Ill-fitting dentures**



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- Dry mouth or xerostomia is not a normal part of aging.
- Many common medications reduce the production of saliva.
- Many of the persons you care for are taking many of these medications and will suffer from dry mouth.
- Dry mouth can increased risk of dental cavities, gum disease and infection.
- Dry mouth can also make it hard to eat, swallow, taste, speak, and cause dentures not to fit properly.
- If a person you care for complains of dry mouth offer him or her water periodically throughout the day. Some people benefit from sucking hard sugarless candy. The dentist may prescribe an artificial saliva.

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What is PLAQUE ?

Bacteria from food and sweets not completely removed from teeth and dentures on a daily basis causes plaque

- ❑ **Plaque starts as a soft sticky film**
- ❑ **Plaque becomes rock hard (calculus) over time**



Plaque is the most common and serious dental health issue.

- Plaque starts as a soft and sticky film of bacteria from food and sweets that forms on teeth and dentures.
- This hardened plaque is called calculus and holds bacteria in the mouth and causes damage to the gums and damage to the bone that supports the teeth.

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Consequences of Plaque Bacteria

- ❑ **Gum Disease
(Periodontal Disease)
leading to tooth loss**
- ❑ **Dental Cavities**
- ❑ **Respiratory Disease**

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***It is plaque, not aging,
that causes tooth loss***

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- Tooth loss does not have to happen just because a person is older.
- Plaque bacteria causes gum disease or periodontal disease which is an infection in the mouth. Gum disease must be treated or it leads to loss of jawbone and loose teeth.
- Plaque bacteria is also the cause of dental caries and if untreated can lead to abscesses and oral pain.
- Plaque in the mouth can also be inhaled into the respiratory system and cause serious consequences especially among medically high-risk residents.
- Plaque needs to be completely cleaned away on a daily basis to prevent destruction of oral tissues.

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Direct Care Staff are IMPORTANT

***You can prevent the older
person's decline in
health with daily dental
hygiene care***



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When direct care staff reinforce daily mouth care it can make a big difference in reducing the older person's risk of developing dental disease and oral pain.

Dental disease is preventable with proper oral hygiene care.

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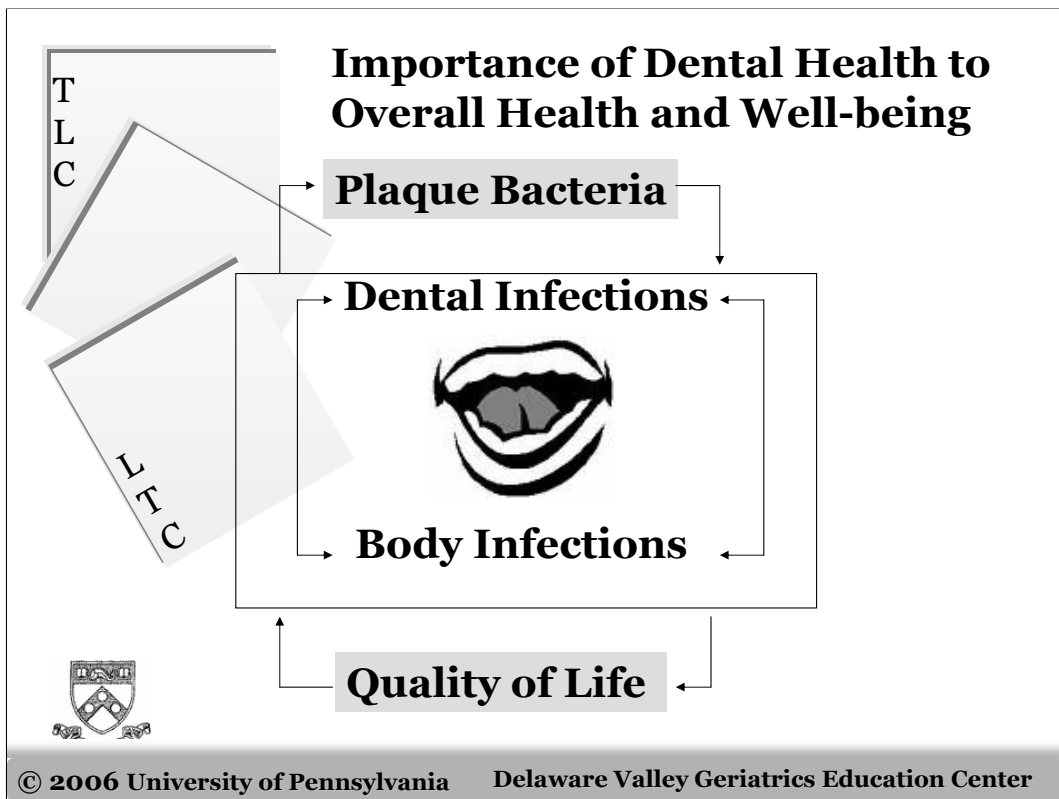
Daily Mouth Care

BENEFITS to Older Adults and Direct Care Staff

- Minimize medical problems**
- Enhance quality of life**
- Enhance cooperation**
- Enhance nursing care delivery**

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- Daily mouth care benefits older adults in long-term care by minimizing medical problems and improving quality of life.
- Also, older adults whose mouth is free of disease and pain may be more cooperative which may help nursing staff to provide more efficient care.
- More detail will be given later on regarding ways to thoroughly remove plaque.



This picture summarizes the major points that have been discussed so far.

- Dental health and body health work together.
- The bacteria from plaque is the cause of gum disease and loose teeth, not old age.
- Infections in the mouth can lead to infections in other parts of the body.
- The consequences of poor oral health can negatively affect a persons quality of life.

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Oral Health Care Delivery

- How can I better provide dental care?
- Are there special products that will help me to do a better job with daily mouth care?
- Are there any tips that will help me to provide mouth care for an older person that is uncooperative?



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You want to provide the best to the older persons you care for. Maybe you have questions like these regarding providing appropriate mouth care:

How can I provide better mouth care when I have many other things to do?

- Think of the mouth as just one of the many parts of the body to be kept clean

Are there special tips that can make older persons' teeth and dentures easier for me to clean?

- Many older persons have arthritis and cannot properly grip a toothbrush. There are dental supplies that can help. This will be discussed in detail later in the presentation.
- You might be more enthusiastic about doing daily mouth care if you knew about different products that will make providing dental care easier. These products will be reviewed later in the module.

What about mouth care on an older person who resists care?

- As you know, this is difficult to do at times. You may not always be able to completely clean as well as you may like. Daily removal of plaque is still better than no cleaning. Later we will discuss products and techniques for care of these persons.

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WE CAN CONTROL DENTAL DISEASES

- **Daily Plaque Removal**
- **Functional, Physical, and Cognitive Impaired Older Adults**



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- Dental diseases are preventable with daily plaque control.
- Declines in dental health can be avoided with good regular daily mouth care.
- The presentation will show you ways to do better dental care when you have older persons with a variety of functional, physical and cognitive impairments.
- First we will talk about older adults with natural teeth.

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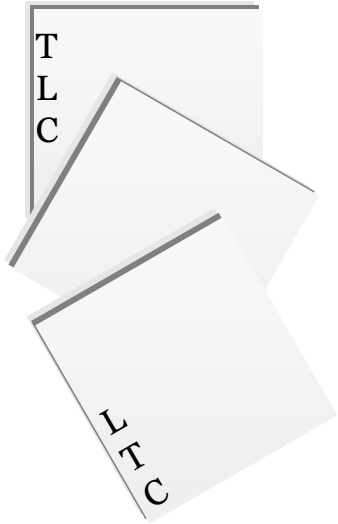


WE CAN CONTROL DENTAL DISEASES

- Older adults with
Natural Teeth**
- Cognitively Impaired
Older Adults with
Natural Teeth**
- Denture Care**

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- The remainder of the presentation should answer many of your questions regarding providing mouth care to older persons.
- First, we will talk about how to do daily mouth care on older adults with that have all or some of their natural teeth.
- Next we will talk about how to do daily mouth care on older adults that are cognitively impaired and we will conclude with how to do daily mouth care on older adults that have dentures or partial dentures.



SUGGESTED PLAQUE CONTROL

Older Adults with Natural Teeth

Toothbrushing

Removes plaque on the surface of teeth

- Soft toothbrush**
- Circular motion**
- Brush for 2 minutes**
- Massage gums**



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- Tooth brushing removes plaque on the surface of teeth.
- You should use a toothbrush with soft bristles. This protects the enamel on the teeth from wearing away and the gums from being damaged while brushing.
- Never use a toothbrush with medium or hard bristles.
- Using small circular movements and gently massage gums as you scrub the teeth.
- Brush for approximately two minutes.

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SUGGESTED PLAQUE CONTROL

Older Adults with Natural Teeth

Flossing

*Removes plaque between teeth and
under the gums*

- Up and down motion**
- Careful not to cut into gums**

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- Flossing removes the plaque from between the teeth and under the gums where the toothbrush cannot reach.
- Wrap floss around index fingers and gently do an up and down motion between teeth, being careful not to cut into gums.
- Flossing can be difficult to do. There are dental supplies for cleaning between teeth that are easier than wrapping floss around your fingers.

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SUGGESTED PLAQUE CONTROL

**Brushing and flossing
together thoroughly clean
teeth and prevent dental
cavities, gum disease and
tooth loss.**

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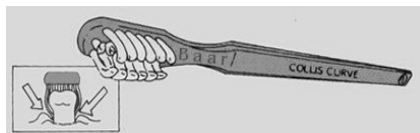
- Brushing and flossing together thoroughly cleans plaque from teeth.
- The next slides will show dental supplies that will make cleaning teeth easier.

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User Friendly Dental Hygiene Aids Removing Plaque on Tooth Surfaces

Easier to Do Dental Care

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Collis Curve Toothbrush
**Collis Curve
Toothbrush**

Electric and Manual
Toothbrush

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- Electric toothbrushes have larger handles that can be gripped more easily by persons with physical impairments.
- Electric toothbrushes are also easier for caregivers to use when cleaning someone else's teeth.
- The Collis Curve toothbrush is designed with three rows of bristles that can clean the front, back, and top surfaces of teeth at the same time. This brush may be easier for caregivers to use and also for older persons that have limited movement in their fingers and hands.

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User Friendly Dental Hygiene Aids

Removing Plaque on Tooth Surfaces

Easier to Do Dental Care



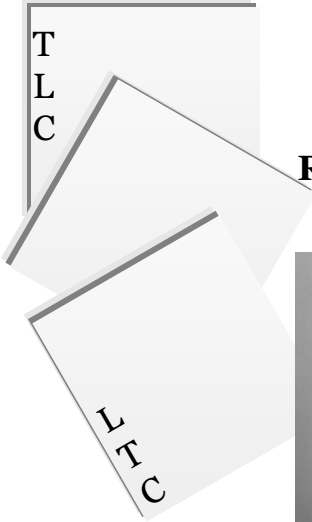
Toothette

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- A foam stick or Toothette can be a helpful dental aid for controlling plaque among older persons who are severely resistant to mouth care.
- This is not the most efficient way to clean teeth, but it may be the most beneficial way when brushing and flossing are not possible.
- The dentist may prescribe a fluoride gel to help prevent developing new cavities. A toothette is a good way to apply the gel to the teeth among persons who will not open their mouth or allow for use of a toothbrush.

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User Friendly Dental Hygiene Aids Removing Plaque Between Teeth



**Floss Holders and
Disposable Floss**



Proxa-brush



Stimudents



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- Flossing can be difficult to do even for those of us that don't have any physical or cognitive impairments.
- For more control while using floss try holders that come with long handles. This dental aid can be very helpful for caregivers and among older persons who have dexterity problems.
- Proxa-brushes are little toothbrushes and come in a variety of sizes. These are especially good when there are spaces between teeth.
- Some people like to use toothpicks when there is some food caught between their teeth. Stimudents are flat toothpicks that have a blunt point so that the gums are not harmed when cleaning between teeth.

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User Friendly Dental Hygiene Aids

Helps To Keep Mouth Open



Mouth Prop

- **Safety**
- **Control**
- **Comfort**



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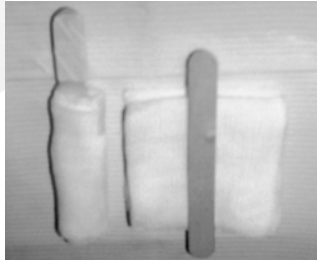
- The foam mouth prop was designed for caregivers to use to help keep the mouth open among older persons with cognitive impairment.
- The unique design of the head and handle give greater safety, control, and comfort. The caregiver can adjust how wide to open the mouth.

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User Friendly Dental Hygiene Aids

Helps To Keep Mouth Open

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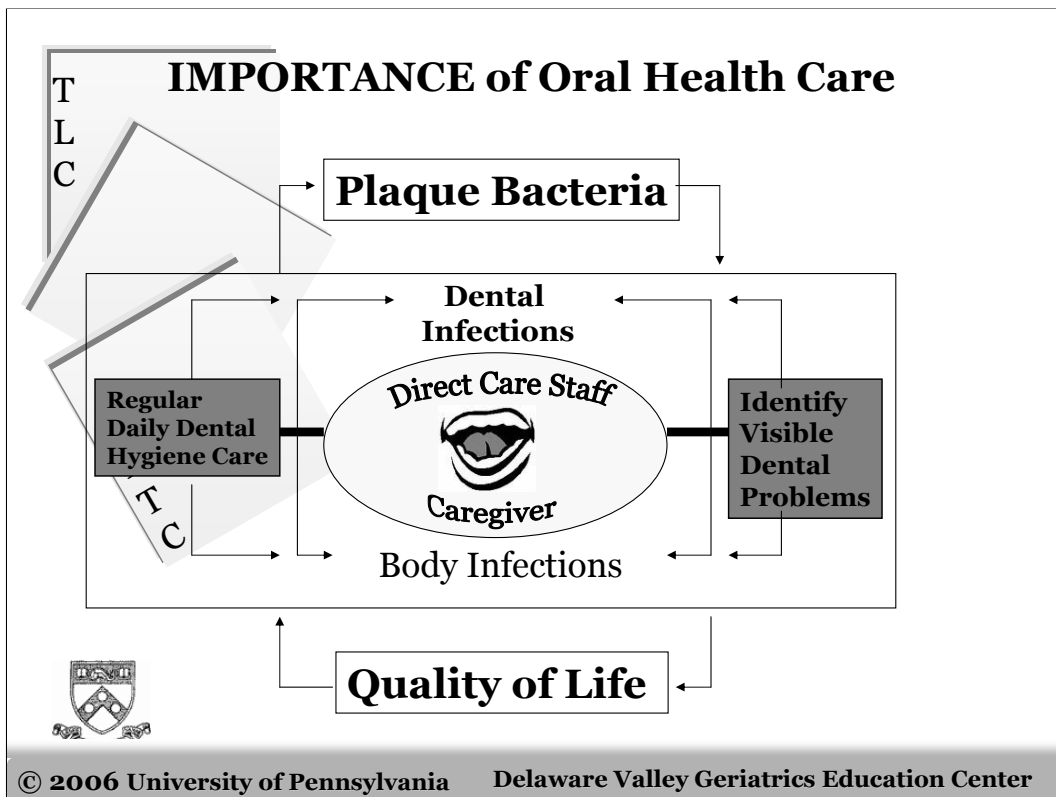
- **Make mouth prop**
- **Tongue depressors**
- **Gauze**



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•You can also make a mouth prop by wrapping gauze to a cushion at the end of a tongue depressor.



We have been talking about mouth care to control plaque bacteria in older persons with natural teeth.

Next we will discuss mouth care in persons with different degrees of physical and cognitive limitations.

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Older Adults Able to Do Self-Care

Dental Health Care Aids

- Electric
Toothbrush
- Regular
Toothbrush
- Floss Holding
Devices

How Direct Care Staff Can Assist

- Make sure dental
health care aids are
readily available for
use



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- These next slides will outline how you can provide better mouth care and promote the health of those you care for.
- You can assist older adults that can do their own dental care by making sure that dental hygiene supplies are easily available.
- These persons may want to use an electric toothbrush and floss holding devices for cleaning teeth.

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Older Adults Able to Do Self-Care *Mild to Moderate Physical Impairment or Mild Cognitive Impairment*

Dental Health Care Aids

- Electric
Toothbrush**
- Adapted
Toothbrush**
- Collis Curve
Toothbrush**
- Floss Holding
Devices**

How Direct Care Staff Can Assist

- Encourage as much
self care as possible**
- Remind often for
those with
cognitive
impairment**
- Check to ensure
thorough cleaning**



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- For those older adults with mild to moderate physical impairment, such as arthritis, encourage them to do as much of their own mouth care as possible.
- Modified toothbrushes and floss holding devices can help.
- For older adults with mild cognitive impairment, occasionally remind them of how to brush. Be prepared to follow up to make sure teeth are clean.

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Older Adults Able to Do Self-Care *Moderate Cognitive Impairment*

Dental Health Care Aids

- Electric
Toothbrush**
- Adapted
Toothbrush**
- Collis Curve
Toothbrush**
- Floss Holding
Devices**

How Direct Care Staff Can Assist

Can Follow Directions:

- Constant reminding**
- Break up the steps
for cleaning into
simple steps**
- Post step-by-step
instructions on
mirror and label
mouth supplies**



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- Some older adults with moderate cognitive impairment may still be able to follow directions and do their own mouth care.
- They probably will need ongoing reminders of how to brush.
- You may have to show them first or guide their hands. It may be helpful to break the cleaning tasks into smaller steps.
- For a person who can read, write step-by-step instructions on a piece of paper and post it on the bathroom mirror
- Also label dental health supplies.
- Modified toothbrushes (e.g. the Collis toothbrush) and floss holding devices may help.

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Older Adults Unable to Do Self-Care *Severe Physical and/or Cognitive Impairment*

Dental Health Care Aids

- Foam Mouth Prop
- Electric Toothbrush
- Collis Curve
Toothbrush
- Floss Holding Devices

How Direct Care Staff Can Assist

- Regular time for
dental care each
day for cognitive
impaired
- Prior to care,
explain cleaning
process in a
gentle and calm
manner for
cognitive impaired

Not Resistant to Care



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Older adults with severe physical or cognitive impairments lose the ability to clean teeth and dentures.

- For those that are not resistant some suggestions include
 - setting a regular time for mouth care and
 - prior to cleaning the teeth explain what you are doing in a calm manner.

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Older Adults Unable to Do Self-Care *Severe Cognitive Impairment*

Dental Health Care Aids

- Foam Mouth Props
- Gauge wrapped tongue depressor
- Toothette
- Floss Holding Devices
- Electric Toothbrush
- Collis Curve Toothbrush

How Direct Care Staff Can Assist

May require two
caregivers:

- One to distract the person and the other to provide care
- DO NOT force care



Resistant to Care

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- Older persons that are resistant to care are the greatest challenge.
- Two caregivers may be necessary to provide mouth care.
- One caregiver can try to distract the person by singing, gentle touch, giving the elder something of interest to hold or talking while the other caregiver uses the foam mouth prop to gain entry into the mouth.
- You may have to coach the person through each step of the process similar to show and tell. For example saying “open wide” and then demonstrate with gestures.
- DO NOT force care. Try again at another time when the older person is not as distressed.
- The Toothette or foam stick may be the best choice in some cases for plaque removal.
- Modified toothbrushes, mouth props and floss holding devices are recommended.

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DENTURE CARE

Plaque will also form on dentures and partial dentures

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- Mouth care does not stop just because a person wears dentures.
- Plaque will also form on dentures and partial dentures.
- Daily cleaning of dentures is just as important as daily cleaning of natural teeth.

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DENTURE SAFETY

- ❑ *Dentures should be labeled with the name or initials of the person*
- ❑ *Dentures are easy to misplace*



- Anyone who wears dentures should have the dentures labeled with their name or initials on both the upper and lower denture.
- It is very easy to misplace dentures.

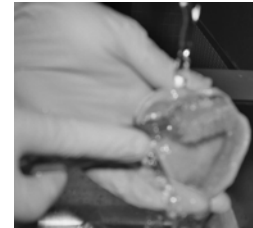
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Denture Hygiene Care

- ❑ Dishwashing Detergent
- ❑ Denture brush or hard nailbrush
- ❑ Running water / washcloth in sink
- ❑ Denture cleaner tablets
- ❑ Denture paste



Denture
Brush



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- Dentures should be cleaned at least once daily.
- Use a denture brush or hard nailbrush and scrub off plaque and food particles on teeth including the outside and inside of denture under running water.
- Put a towel in the sink to protect dentures from breaking if they fall accidentally.
- Denture cleaning tablets can be used in addition to cleaning with dishwashing detergents and water, but are not a substitute for dishwater detergent and water scrubbing.
- All denture paste or powder should be removed from the denture each day before applying new denture paste or powder.

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Denture Storage Container Care

- Cleaned weekly**
- Diluted bleach**
- Soak 1 hour**
- Rinse thoroughly**



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- Dentures should be stored in a container with water when not in the mouth.
- The storage container should be regularly cleaned with diluted bleach and soaked for one hour. Rinse thoroughly before use.

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DENTURE CARE

- ❑ *Dentures should NOT be worn 24 hours a day*
- ❑ *Leave out at least 6 hours per day*

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- Dentures, whether full or partial should not be worn all day.
- Leave dentures out at least 6 hours per day to allow the gums to breathe
- Wearing dentures constantly irritates the gums
- Dentures that fit poorly can also irritate gums.

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Older Adults Able to Do Self-Care of Dentures

Dental Health Care Aids

- Denture Brush
- Cleaning Tablets

How Direct Care Staff Can Assist

- Make sure denture supplies are readily available
- Check weekly sanitation of denture storage container



- You can assist older persons with dentures who are able to do their own care by having denture supplies readily available for use.
- Also check to make sure the denture storage container is kept clean.

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Older Adults Unable to Do Self-Care

Physical or Cognitive Impairment

Dental Health Care Aids

- Denture Brush
- Cleaning
Tablets

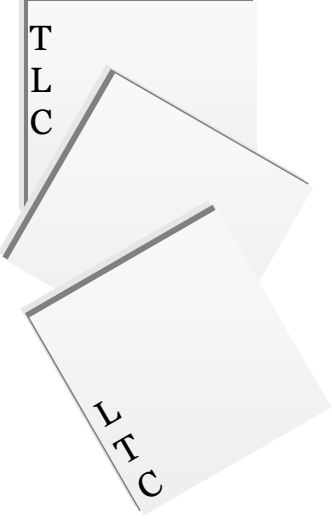
How Direct Care Staff Can Assist

- Physically clean
dentures daily
- Remove dentures at
night and store in
container with
water
- Weekly cleaning of
denture container




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•For those persons that are unable to care for their dentures make sure to remove dentures prior to bedtime, brush clean and store in container with water. Re-insert dentures in the morning and weekly sterilize denture container.



Signs of Dental Problems To Report

- Broken teeth
- Loose teeth
- Brown areas and dark staining
- Bleeding gums
- Ill-fitting dentures



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- In the process of helping older persons with their mouth care, you have the opportunity to see problems and changes in the mouth that may be important. These could be problems a dentist can repair or early signs of cancer in the mouth.
- It is important for you to be aware of harmful signs in the mouth because the persons you care for will *not* notice them, especially if they do not have pain.
- These problems may include broken and loose teeth, brown areas and staining on teeth, gums that bleed when brushed, and ill-fitting dentures.
- Report such changes to health care providers for evaluation.

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Early Signs of Oral Cancer to Report

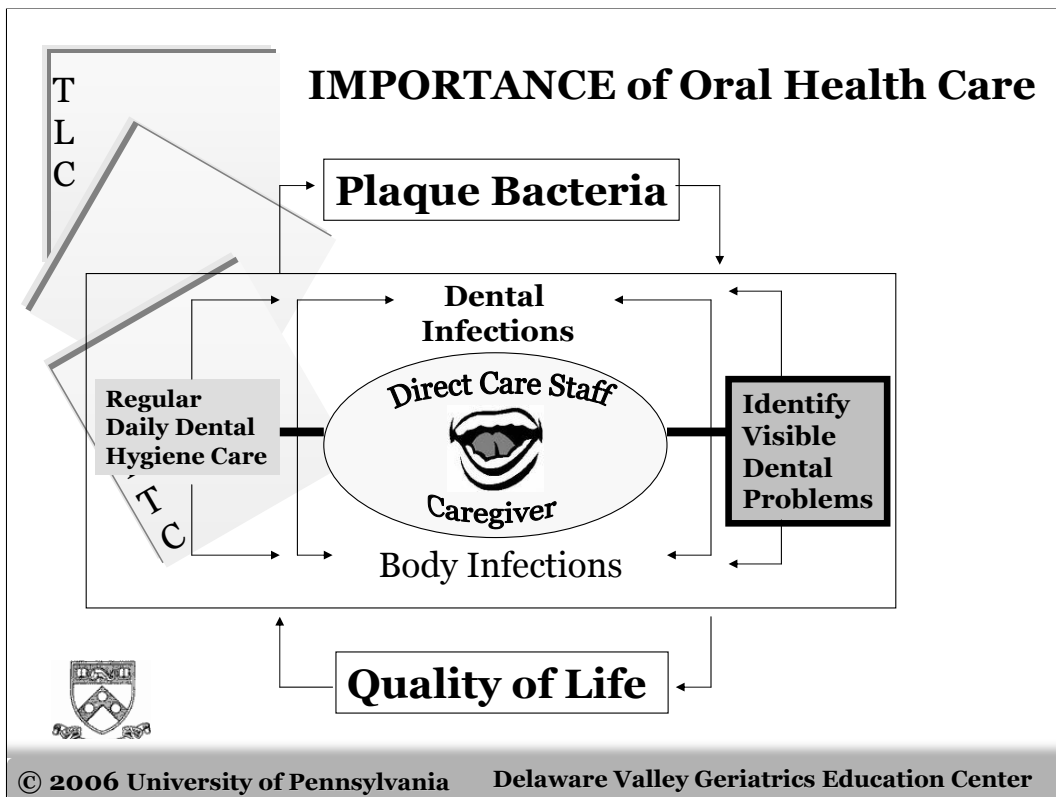
- Swellings
- Red or White Patches
- Sores
- Numbness
- Lumps

Early oral cancer may be present even without pain



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- Pain is usually not an early symptom of the disease.
- It is important to notice the early signs of oral cancer.
- These include swellings, red or white patches, sores, numbness or lumps anywhere in the mouth or on the tongue.



- In conclusion, remember good daily mouth care will help the dental health and general health of the persons you care for.
- You can do it!!

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Summary of Objectives

You will now be able to:

- Discuss why good dental health promotes overall health and quality of life
- Describe the potential benefits to nursing care delivery when daily dental care is maintained
- Discuss plaque bacteria and how prevention can protect the mouth from damage caused by plaque
- Identify ways to control plaque in older persons that are functionally dependent and cognitively impaired
- Identify visible dental problems that should be reported to the nurse or other healthcare provider who might refer to the dentist



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Summary of learning objectives:

You will now be able to:

Discuss why good dental health promotes overall health and quality of life

- Describe the potential benefits to nursing care delivery when daily dental care is maintained
- Discuss plaque bacteria and how prevention can protect the mouth from damage caused by plaque
- Identify ways to control plaque in older persons that are functionally dependent and cognitively impaired
- Identify visible dental problems that should be reported to the nurse or other healthcare provider who might refer to the dentist

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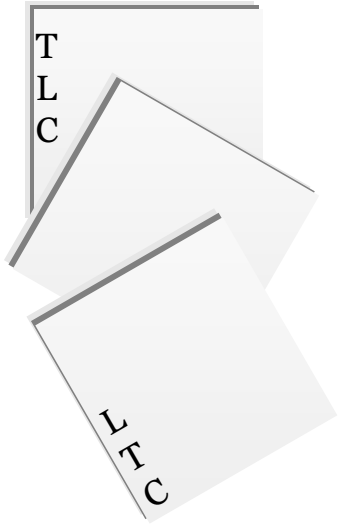
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The End

