

Good Oral Hygiene in Parkinson's

Speech & Swallowing Issues



Studies have indicated that people with a diagnosis of Parkinson disease may have poorer oral hygiene and a greater incidence of infection as compared to the general public¹. In Parkinson disease good oral hygiene is essential to:

- Maintain comfort
- Reduce likelihood of bad breath
- Reduce risk of cavities, gum disease and other mouth infections which can further health issues
- Reduce the risk of pneumonia (infection in the lungs from bacteria in the mouth)
- Help manage saliva which can reduce drooling or stimulate saliva flow
- A healthy mouth also contributes to improved chewing, swallowing, speaking, appetite and enjoyment of food

Performing basic oral hygiene tasks can become more challenging as Parkinson disease progresses. In addition to motor-related challenges (such as tremor, rigidity, decreased range of motion), there may also be behavioral changes such as cognition, apathy and depression that can have an impact on good oral hygiene.

Motor-related challenges may include, but are not limited to:

- Holding/gripping a toothbrush
- Removing cap/squeezing toothpaste from the tube
- Putting dentures in and/or taking them out
- Turning the faucet off
- Spitting after brushing
- Holding a cup for rinsing
- Working with dental floss
- Clearing mouth of saliva

What can be done to improve Oral Hygiene?

1. Brushing teeth with a fluoride toothpaste twice per day will help to prevent plaque buildup and keep the mouth clean of bacteria build up.
2. Floss between the teeth once per day to remove food and plaque that the toothbrush may miss.
3. Those wearing dentures should be mindful of a continued "good fit" and ensure a proper cleaning.

There are a myriad of tips, tricks and tools available to help make good oral hygiene easier.

To start, if at all possible, schedule oral care routines around medication "on" times.

To address issues with grip and dexterity opt for toothbrushes with a wider handle or electric toothbrushes. Trouble finding a wider grip toothbrush? Try these innovative tricks of placing the toothbrush inside of a bicycle handlebar grip or tennis ball!

Utilizing an alcohol-free mouthwash can not only contribute to a healthy mouth, but also alleviate some occurrences of dry mouth.

Floss holders, tongue scrapers and toothpaste pumps (including automatic) can be purchased at local shopping centers. Portable oral suction devices are also available to purchase at specialty/adaptive tool stores.

A visit to an occupational therapist can be beneficial as he/she can provide simple

modifications to one's oral hygiene routine and other adaptive equipment suggestions.

Location, location, location. The bathroom is not the ONLY place to practice good oral hygiene. In some instances the bathroom may be too small and restrict movement; especially if assistance is needed by another individual. The kitchen and/or dining room table are alternatives. Sitting down at a dining room table, for example, with a basin, glass of water, toothbrush, toothpaste, floss and towel within easy reach can provide more space, be more comfortable and provide a more pleasant experience for everyone.

For those experiencing memory and/or apathy issues or who have difficulty remembering the details/steps for good oral hygiene – posting a note in the bathroom (say on a mirror) to remind them of the steps to follow may be beneficial.

Don't forget your Dentist!

Regular dental appointments are key to not only maintaining good oral hygiene but identify any potential issues that may arise (cavities, infections, etc) and treat them BEFORE they cause unnecessary pain. To ensure a pleasant and productive dentist visit consider taking the following steps:

- Have a discussion with the dental office prior to the appointment to discuss how Parkinson disease may affect the appointment (tremors, rigidity, difficulty speaking, anxiety, etc). An Aware in Care Kit is a great tool to help with this.
- Also be sure to bring up specific issues being experienced (ie: dry mouth, excessive drooling, etc) as the dentist can help address them.
- Providing a medication list to the dentist will ensure that the risk of medication interactions is kept low.
- Request a 45° incline or higher and extra suction to assist with saliva production and swallowing issues.
- If possible, schedule the appointment during your peak "on" time.

Are you a Care Partner or family member looking to help your loved one maintain good oral health? Find more information on this topic on the resource sheet titled "Helping with Oral Hygiene"

References

¹ Grover, Satbir & Rhodus, Nelson. (2011). Dental management of Parkinson's disease. *Northwest dentistry*. 90. 13-9.