

6. Often family/care workers won't brush the teeth as they "are afraid that the patient will bite me". Keep your fingers between the cheeks and teeth — not between the teeth. Try using a mouth prop; it just may help!
7. Keep on brushing the patient's teeth. Don't give up, and remember that you are trying to teach them to accept this important daily oral health practice.
8. Workers and family members often say that the patient won't let them clean their teeth, yet they let us clean them at their clinic visits. Many times this is because they are being too aggressive and scrubbing the teeth and gums, which can be uncomfortable and cause some pain. Remember to be Gentle but Thorough!
9. **These are just guidelines, and need to be modified for each patient.**

Guidelines on Oral Hygiene Instruction

Patients with Special Needs

Steps of Oral Hygiene

1. Determine who performs the daily oral hygiene: the patient's family member, caregiver or support staff?
2. Determine how many times a day oral hygiene care is provided, and the duration of each session. Do they use toothpaste? If so, does it contain fluoride? Determine whether they use any oral rinses that are available in stores or by prescription. Finally, where in the residence is oral hygiene care provided?
3. Ask the individual to demonstrate how he or she practices oral hygiene (if they use a rotary/electric brush they should have it with them; if not, use the manual toothbrush). They should dispense the toothpaste and then brush their teeth so that you can see their method in order to provide advice and reinforcement.
4. The clinician should demonstrate oral hygiene on the patient with the worker /family watching, so they learn how to do it.
5. Smaller soft or medium soft toothbrushes are preferred and recommended — especially on patients with tighter lips. Bigger brushes get caught up on the lips and misses the gingival margin where plaque and food debris accumulates.

6. Dispense small amounts of toothpaste with fluoride, no more than the size of a pea. Reassure the family/support worker, that they do not need to worry if some of this small amount is swallowed. If a patient tends to eat the paste you can use a small amount, immediately wipe it off, and brush with the remnants on the brush.
7. Brush in a gentle but thorough manner from the gingival margin onto the tooth (**Gentle but thorough** is the mantra) doing every tooth in the mouth.
8. Have the patient rinse out if they can rinse and spit. If not, you can wipe out his or her mouth with some gauze or a face cloth.
9. Oral hygiene should be performed after each meal. The most important time to provide a thorough cleaning is at night after all eating is done before one goes to bed.

Reminders for Dentists and Support Workers/Families

1. If the lips are hyperactive/hypertonic, retract the lips so you can see the gingival area — **“you can't clean it, if you can't see it”**. If this is not done, then you are most likely only brushing the occlusal/biting surface of the teeth.

2. If the patient is not able to brush well on his or her own, then someone else should supervise and help them with it. The caregiver should stand behind the patient when brushing their teeth, in this way they can mimic the sweeping motion they do in their own mouth, transferring the same motion to the patient. From this position they should have an unobstructed view of the oral cavity and all the teeth.
3. Establish whether the patient has the ability to rinse and spit. Only recommend an oral rinse if they can rinse and spit. If they cannot, oral rinse products can be applied to the teeth with a toothbrush.
4. If co-operation permits, flossing between teeth is ideal. A floss wand can be of assistance. Avoid putting your fingers between the patient's teeth if there is a chance they will bite down.
5. If a patient will not open their mouth, you can try to use a clean / boiled rubber door jam as a mouth prop. If the patient still won't open or remain open, brush the buccal cheek surfaces of the teeth well. The tongue should self cleanse the lingual surfaces of the teeth. The patient does not need to open their mouth to allow you to brush the cheek /facial surfaces of the teeth.