

Oral Care And The Health of Elders

Proper dental care for the elders in your care has a significant impact on both their quality of life and overall health. Uncorrected dental problems can cause serious health conditions including pneumonia and heart problems. Poor oral hygiene can result in the build up of dental and denture plaque, harmful respiratory bacteria and inflammatory agents. All of these put a person, especially an elder, at risk of pneumonia. Current research suggests that poor oral care can increase the risk of pneumonia by three-fold. Pneumonia is the leading cause of death in nursing homes and affects about 41% of residents.

Unfortunately, current oral care practices in the Long Term Care setting are often not up to standard and in one study were described as appalling with only 16% of residents receiving adequate oral care. This study that was done by the University of Rochester, New York found that the average time spent by caregivers brushing the elder's teeth was just 17 seconds and in 73% of cases, toothbrushes and toothpaste were not available. On one occasion the researchers observed a caregiver wiping a resident's buttocks and then, with stool on her gloves, cleaning the residents teeth with a toothette. One would hope that this situation is not common in the Long Term Care setting.

Top Research Based Strategies

- ◇ Clean elder's teeth with toothbrush and toothpaste after each meal—at least 2 minutes
- ◇ Use dental floss only if tolerated
- ◇ Promote independence—give one step directions.
- ◇ Provide hand-over-hand help when needed.
- ◇ If unable to brush independently, clean teeth of seated person while standing behind them and holding their head with one hand while brushing with the other.
- ◇ Monitor the elders mouth and observe for the following:
 - Red, sore, swollen gums
 - Bleeding gums
 - Loose or sensitive teeth
 - Bad breath
 - Poor fitting dentures
 - Dentures that cause pain
- ◇ Use kind and gentle manners, praise and encouragement.

Basic Oral Care Tips

- ◇ Wash hands and put on disposable gloves.
- ◇ Sit or stand where you can see all the surfaces of the teeth.
- ◇ Use a toothbrush with soft bristles.
- ◇ Use a pea-sized amount of toothpaste or none at all (toothpaste can bother elders who have swallowing problems).
- ◇ Brush the front, back and top of each tooth gently, using short strokes.
- ◇ Help the elder rinse with plain water. Give elders who can't rinse a drink of water or sweep the mouth with a finger wrapped in gauze.



Oral Care for the Alzheimer's Patient

Coping with routine dental care can be a real challenge for those elders who have Alzheimer's disease. Familiar activities such as tooth brushing and mouth rinsing become increasingly difficult as the elder loses the ability to perform activities of daily living or forgets how to do them. They may not understand what the toothpaste and toothbrush are for or may be confused because they can no longer plan the sequence of events that are need to clean their teeth. Some research shows that often the caregivers do not have enough patience or understanding when delivering oral care to elders with dementia. Below are some tips for providing oral care to those with Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia:

- ◇ Slow down. Be patient. Don't rush the elder.
- ◇ Explain what you're going to do, and show them ahead of time.
- ◇ Don't force them to do things that they may be afraid of.
- ◇ Use proven successful procedures and approaches involved in Alzheimer's care
- ◇ Be friendly, understanding, compassionate at all times

It is essential that caregivers provide good oral care because the elder with Alzheimer's disease may not remember to do it on their own and may not be able to tell you if they are having mouth problems.

Resources: Alzheimer's Care Guide, Sept/Oct 08 & May/June 09

Katherine Punch Resource Library

For more information on dementia visit the Alzheimer Society's resource library.
633 Albert Street East, Sault Ste. Marie 705 942-2195

Upcoming Events

Pan Northern Geriatric Conference

Pursuing Excellence in Geriatric Care

The 2nd Pan Northern Geriatric Care conference will offer the equivalent of 2 full days of intensive learning to all health care professionals who work with older adults in different settings across the continuum of care.

Wednesday, October 28th, 2009

To

Friday, October 30th, 2009

Great Northern Hotel and Conference Centre
220 Great Northern Road, Sault Ste. Marie, ON

For further information please contact: **Deana Stephen 1 866 551 6501**
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Caregiver Forum

"Mother, I'm Doing the Best I Can"

Featured Speaker: **Jayne Harvey**

This important seminar represents a unique opportunity for you to learn from one of North America's leading speakers and educators in the field of aging. Jayne will help you understand the issues facing you and the necessary direction to resolve them. You will be amazed at how clearly Jayne Harvey will put your life and relationships with your family into perspective. After attending this seminar, you will be inspired to act in a positive direction.

Pre -registration is required

Please RSVP to 942-2195 by October 23, 2009.

Evaluation and Feedback: To ensure that this newsletter is an effective source of information for you, your feedback is important to us. Please visit our website www.dementiaalgoma.org and fill out the evaluation.