

Oral Health Tips for People with Cerebral Palsy



Why oral health matters!

- People with CP may experience extra challenges with brushing, swallowing, positioning, dry mouth, diet, or accessing dental care.

Good oral health can help prevent:

- Toothache / Bleeding gums / Infections / Difficulty eating / Urgent dental visits.

Helpful Extras!

- Ask your dentist or oral health therapist about fluoride varnish or extra fluoride support if decay risk is higher.
- Dry mouth or drooling may need personalised advice and extra care.
- Routine dental visits every 6 months.

Why Routine Dental Visits Matter?

- Regular reviews can detect: early decay, gum disease, calculus build-up, tooth wear, trauma issues = before they become painful.
- Easier visits over time, For people with CP, repeated familiar visits can help build comfort with: clinic environment, staff, chair positioning, sensory tolerance communication needs.
- This can reduce stress versus only attending in emergencies.
- Dental visits also allow tailored guidance on brushing adaptations, fluoride needs, dry mouth, drooling, diet risks and referral pathways.

Every person is different. The best oral health plan is one that works for you and the person you support.

Daily Home Care Tips

Brush Teeth Your Every Day!

- Brush **twice a day** with **fluoride toothpaste**.
- Night-time brushing is the most important.
- If brushing is difficult, start small and build a routine.
- **Brush for 2 min** allowing 30 sec per each side. (e.g top right, bottom right, top left, bottom left)
- Gently lift the lip to help see the gums and teeth.
- Angle the toothbrush towards the gum line and brush all tooth surfaces.
- If brushing is difficult, using a **finger brush** with a small smear of toothpaste may be a helpful starting step.

Toothpaste Tips!

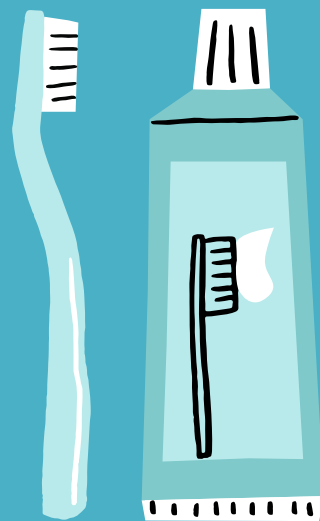
- Use a small amount of fluoride toothpaste.
- A smear or pea-sized amount may be easier if swallowing is a concern.
- Spit out the excess toothpaste if able to.
- Avoid rinsing after brushing.
- Consider trying a non-foaming toothpaste. However, some can be more expensive and may not contain fluoride, so check the label before buying.

“What do I do if they can’t spit?”

- After brushing, let excess toothpaste dribble out or gently wipe away the foam using a cloth, gauze, face washer or toothbrush head.
- If comfortable and safe, tilt the head slightly forward or to the side to help excess toothpaste flow out more easily.
- If swallowing is a regular concern, ask a dentist or oral health therapist for personalised toothpaste advice.

Helpful Toothbrush Options!

- Modified or larger-handled toothbrushes can be easier to grip and control.
- Three-headed toothbrushes clean multiple tooth surfaces at the same time, making brushing quicker and easier.
- Electric toothbrushes do the brushing motion for you and can make cleaning more effective. If noise or vibration is uncomfortable, other options may be better suited.
- Finger toothbrushes can provide better access and control when cleaning inside the mouth.
- Soft, damp gauze or a clean face washer wrapped around a finger can be a gentle alternative if a standard toothbrush feels too harsh or causes discomfort. Cotton tips (Q-tips) may help clean small areas if needed.



Cleaning Between Teeth

- Water flossers may help remove trapped food and can be easier for some people to tolerate.
- Floss holders or interdental brushes may also be useful.

Medications

- Many medications used by people with CP fall into three main groups: medications for anti-seizures, muscle stiffness/spasticity, and uncontrolled movements.
- Some of these medications may affect the mouth by causing dry mouth, gum changes, increasing decay risk or mouth irritations.
- Let your dental team know about all medications you are taking.

Diet Tips

- Offer water after snacks or meals (if safe to swallow).
- Reduce sugary foods and drinks, especially between meals and at night.
- Limit acidic drinks and foods where possible to help protect teeth.
- If suitable, using a straw may help reduce contact between drinks and teeth.
- Try to keep sugary or refined carbohydrate foods to mealtimes rather than frequent snacking.

