

CARE OF THE MOUTH

Frequent thorough care of the mouth is of the greatest importance to the patient in the hospital. Inactive patients, confined to bed, patients who are seriously ill and patients who are on liquid or semi-solid diets are more prone to develop unhygienic mouth conditions than are those who are normal and active. Normal healthy person feel a sense of well being after thorough cleaning of the mouth and teeth. This feeling is much more noticeable among hospital patients and proper care has a valuable psychological effect as well as that of reducing the number of pathogenic bacteria in the mouth and removing the soft food deposits necessary for their growth.

Thorough, careful brushing of all surfaces of all teeth, making certain that all food deposits and debris are removed from the spaces between the teeth as well as the outer and inner surfaces is essential. Gums should also be brushed. The mouth should be opened slightly and the gums and teeth brushed from the gums toward the crowns of the teeth using vertical strokes. The upper and lower teeth should be brushed separately. Brushing alone, using a mixture of salt and baking soda in equal quantities, or using tooth paste or powder is usually satisfactory and thorough rinsing of the mouth with water afterwards further washes out loosened debris and food particles.

Hardened deposits on the necks of the teeth (calculus or tartar) are not appreciably removed by brushing but regular brushing tends to prevent their formation, the presence of these materials causes injury to the gums and food collects more readily in such a mouth. Much of the bleeding from the gums during brushing is due to these hardened materials. These deposits of calculus should be removed by the dental hygienist or dental officer.

Because of the possibility of the patient aspirating or inhaling debris from the mouth into the lungs during or immediately following a general anesthetic, which could be a factor in post-operative pulmonary infection, it is important that proper care of the mouth be included as part of the preparation of the patient for a general anesthetic. Patients under the influence of anesthetics, hypnotic drugs, those who are in shock, seriously ill patients, or those in a comatose condition should receive different care of the mouth in that brushing should be done with a dry brush or by wiping the gums and teeth with gauze or cotton sponges. In these cases the mouth should not be irrigated or rinsed and under no circumstances should a tooth paste or powder be used.

1. With few exceptions the teeth of all patients should be brushed three times daily-preferably after meals.
2. Brush the gums as well as the teeth, brushing from the gums toward the teeth. Brush spaces between the teeth thoroughly. Equal parts of salt and baking soda may be used on the patients' brush.
3. Have the patient rinse the mouth well after brushing, using cold water.
4. Report any cases where gums bleed excessively during brushing to the Ward Officer.
5. The teeth of patients who are under the influence of anesthetics, hypnotic drugs, those in shock, seriously ill patients, or those in a comatose condition should be brushed with a dry brush only. Under no circumstances should a mouth wash or tooth paste or powder be used.