

Church Name

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ASSISTING OLDER ADULTS WITH HYGIENE

Careful attention to grooming helps promote self-esteem by maintaining a neat, attractive appearance. A clean, healthy mouth feels good, makes food taste better, and contributes to overall health.

Encourage the older adult's independence as much as possible, but be ready to assist where needed. If the older adult has reduced memory impairment, manual dexterity and/or one-sided weakness, don't assume that he/she is capable of thorough mouth care. Check and assess this regularly.

Tips for oral hygiene:

- Use brushes with soft bristles to avoid injury to gums.
- Electric toothbrushes make the task of brushing teeth easier for the older adult or caregiver.
- Flossing of teeth should be done at least once a day, preferably at bedtime.
- Offer the older adult mouthwash to use after brushing. Avoid mouthwashes containing alcohol as these cause dryness of the mouth.
- Modified toothbrush handles may help the older adult with one-sided weakness maintain independence with oral hygiene. Adapted toothbrushes may be built up, lengthened, or may have bent handles. See **Tip Sheet on Eating** for adaptive equipment resources.

Tips for care and safe handling of dentures:

- If the older adult needs assistance removing dentures from the mouth, wear gloves if you have them or using a tissue, grasp the front of the upper plate with thumbs and index fingers; using slight pressure, gently wiggle the denture to break its seal on the gum. Then pull the denture forward to remove it from the older adult's mouth. Grasp the lower denture in the same way and turn it slightly to break the seal; then lift it out of the older adult's mouth. Put dentures directly into a denture cup.
- Brush dentures after each meal and at bedtime.
- Place a towel or washcloth in the sink when brushing dentures to avoid breakage should they slip out of your hands. Dentures are very fragile and can break if dropped even a short distance.
- Using warm (not hot) water so as to avoid damage to denture material, brush dentures carefully and thoroughly with toothpaste or special denture cleaner.
- Rinse dentures with cold water.
- Store dentures in a cup of warm water or denture cleaning solution overnight.
- To reinsert dentures, rinse them well under cool running water. Apply dental adhesive if the older adult uses it, following package directions. Insert the upper denture in the older adult's mouth and press it firmly in place. Insert the lower denture, making sure it is properly aligned on the gum.
- A nail brush attached to the counter with a suction cups will help the older adult with one-sided weakness brush his/her dentures independently.

Tips for shampooing hair:

- Shampoo the older adult's hair in the shower or at the sink. Have the older adult hold a washcloth over his/her eyes. At the sink, it will probably be easiest for the older adult to lean forward over the sink. Use a cup to pour water over the older adult's head.
- If it is necessary to shampoo the older adult's hair in bed, a shampoo tray or trough can be obtained from a home medical equipment store.
- Use low dryer heat when drying the older adult's hair. (OVER)

Shaving Tips:

To help preserve the dignity and self-respect of the older man, allow him to shave himself if he is able. It may be necessary to prepare equipment for him.

If you need to assist him:

- Use an electric razor or safety razor. (Sharp blades make the task easier.)
- Place a towel underneath the older adult's chin and across his chest.
- Dentures should be in place, if worn.
- Wash the older adult's face with warm water to soften the whiskers; then apply shaving cream of his choice.
- Shave each area in the direction of hair growth, holding the skin taut with one hand and holding the razor with the other.
- Use caution to prevent nicking the skin.
- Use short, even strokes, rinsing the razor frequently.
- To shave the chin, have older adult "tighten the chin" by drawing lower lip over the teeth.
- To shave above mouth, have older adult "tighten upper lip" by drawing it over teeth; shave in downward strokes.
- To shave neck, have older adult tip his head back; shave upwards toward chin in direction of hair growth.
- When shaving is completed, wash the older adult's face and neck thoroughly with warm water to remove all shaving cream.

Older women may still want to keep legs and underarms shaved and may need assistance.

Tips for care of eyeglasses:

- Wash eyeglasses daily with warm water or eyeglass cleaning solution.
- Dry with a soft cloth, not a paper towel or napkin as these may scratch the lenses.
- Store them in an eyeglass case within easy reach of the older adult.

Tips for care of hearing aids:

- To help the older adult put in a hearing aid, gently insert the tapered end into the ear canal; rotate it so it fits into the curve of the ear; push it up and in with one hand while you gently pull down on the ear lobe with the other hand. It should fit snugly but comfortably and be flush with the outer ear.
- Turn on the control switch and adjust volume by talking to the older adult as you increase the volume.
- Remove the hearing aid by gently pulling up on the older adult's ear. Lift the hearing aid up and out of the ear.
- Remove the batteries or open the battery casing before storing the hearing aid in its case. This practice keeps the batteries from being run down when the aid is not in use and helps dry out any moisture that may collect inside the hearing aid.
- Clean the hearing aid daily to be sure ear wax does not accumulate. Follow manufacturer's instructions.
- Keep extra batteries on hand at all times.
- Protect hearing aids from exposure to heat and moisture.
- Do not use hair spray on the older adult's hair when a hearing aid is in place.

Tips for care of the nails:

- Many older women love to have their fingernails manicured. This simple service does wonders for their self-esteem.
- Toenails are easiest to cut after a bath or warm (not hot) foot soak.
- Toenails should be cut straight across.
- Apply lotion to the feet, except between the toes, to add moisture to dry skin. Use a pumice stone on the heels to help remove dead skin. These can be obtained at most drug stores.
- Inspect the feet with each bath to look for problem areas (red areas indicative of pressure, cracks). Be sure to dry thoroughly between the toes.
- Older adults with toenails thickened due to fungal infection, diabetics, or those with other conditions which impair circulation (e.g., peripheral vascular disease) should be seen by a podiatrist or other experienced professional for toenail cutting.