

Managing Your Condition

Oral Care: How to Take Care of Your Mouth

MAKING SURE YOUR MOUTH IS CLEAN AND MOIST can help you swallow better and prevent infections. Follow these tips to help keep your mouth clean and healthy.

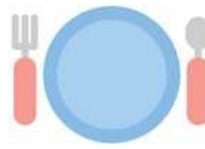
When should I clean my mouth?



In the morning after
breakfast



At night before bed



Before and after
meals



At other times as
recommended by
your healthcare
provider

What tools do I need?

- Toothbrush (electric toothbrush is best)
- Floss or other tools provided by your dentist to clean in between your teeth
- Mouthwash
- Oral moisturizer
- Lip moisturizer

Why do I have to clean my mouth so much?

Keeping your mouth clean can help:

- ▶ **Prevent aspiration pneumonia** by clearing away the film of bad bacteria and germs that can build-up in the mouth between meals and overnight. That way if you aspirate a little bit during the day or night, you will not carry the bad germs into your lungs.
- ▶ **Prevent mouth infections**, including yeast infections and gingivitis
- ▶ **Make sure your mouth is clean** and clear before you eat and drink
- ▶ **Help keep your mouth moist** and increase saliva to help foods slide down easier
- ▶ **Prevent choking or aspirating after the meal** by clearing away food particles that may be stuck on your teeth and in your cheeks

How to Clean Your Mouth:

1. **Sit fully upright or stand.** This position will prevent liquid or other material from falling back into your throat during cleaning.
2. **Inspect your mouth.** Check your lips, teeth, gums, inside cheeks, tongue, and the floor and roof of your mouth. Note any food, excess saliva, coating, bleeding, dryness, swelling, and/or redness. Share anything concerning with your dentist and doctor.
3. **Remove any loose debris.** Use a very soft toothbrush to scrub your tongue, gums, and the entire roof of your mouth. Use mouthwash to help lift and remove any debris from your mouth.
 - ▶ **Tip:** If you do not have the strength to hold mouthwash in your mouth and rinse and spit, then soak a thin cloth or mouth swab with mouthwash and wipe inside your mouth.
4. **Brush your teeth with toothpaste for 2 minutes.** Use an electric toothbrush for the best cleaning action. Gently brush your teeth in circular motions at a 45 degree angle to the gum line. Make sure to brush the entire surface of the teeth. Don't forget the inside surface and around the back of the teeth.
 - ▶ **Tip:** If you wear dentures, gently brush them with a soft-bristled brush and rinse them to remove food and plaque. Soak dentures during day, as needed, and overnight in your denture solution.
5. **Rinse your mouth with mouthwash.** Brushing loosens up the plaque and material around the teeth, but now you have to rinse it away. You may need to lean over the sink to make sure your mouthwash does not spill down the back of your throat.
 - ▶ **Tip:** If you do not have the strength to hold mouthwash in your mouth and rinse and spit, then soak a thin cloth or mouth swab with mouthwash and wipe inside your mouth.
6. **Apply mouth moisturizer.** Ask your dentist or doctor for recommendations for an artificial saliva substitute. Most brands come in a gel or spray bottle form. There are also small discs for dry mouth that can be placed in your mouth for overnight dryness and discomfort. Follow the directions on your brand of mouth moisturizer, but with most brands you can swish and swallow to coat the mouth and throat.
7. **Apply lip moisturizer.** Avoid petroleum-based products, as these do not penetrate and heal tissue.

Tips for a healthy mouth:

- ▶ If you have them, remove and rinse your dentures after every meal. Food can get stuck around your dentures and if left in place, could be aspirated into your lungs.
- ▶ When you clean your mouth, some bleeding is usually okay. Mild bleeding may be a sign that better mouth care is needed. Check with your dentist and doctor.