

VI TIMES

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MN Regions 5 & 7 Vision – O&M Staff

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Oral Hygiene: Brushing Teeth

Learning to brush your own teeth is a basic skill all young children must learn. It is no different for a child with a vision impairment.

The skills involved in oral hygiene include:

- Locating own toothbrush and toothpaste
- Opening the toothpaste
- Applying toothpaste to toothbrush (correct amount)
- Brushing the teeth (up and down movement)
- Spitting
- Rinsing mouth
- Putting the toothbrush and toothpaste away

Next, the child must learn:

- Rinsing mouth with mouthwash
- Using dental floss or dental picks

Making oral hygiene a part of the daily routine is an important step in making it a natural task to do. Brushing teeth after each meal will give your child practice and will make it a part of the routine of the day. Using a hand-under-hand technique to support your child in learning how to brush his/her teeth will be helpful. Some children learn to “brush their teeth” using their finger and toothpaste first, then with a toothbrush. This reduces the tactile defensiveness of the task.

Steps:

1. Locating own toothbrush and toothpaste

- Choose a toothbrush that is compatible with your child’s sensitivity (and dentist’s recommendation)—you may want to begin with softer bristles
- An electric toothbrush (be aware of sound and vibration preferences) may do a better job of cleaning your child’s teeth and gums and don’t require as much motor movement
- A DenTrust 3-Sided Toothbrush® has 2 brush heads with bristles that surround the teeth; Surround® toothbrushes have 3 rows of bristles that surround the teeth (available at most stores)
- Always store toothbrush and toothpaste in the same area and arrangement
- If low vision, use preferred color toothbrush that contrasts with counter/wall
- If blind, mark personal toothbrush with bump-dot, using a different shape or size

2. Opening the toothpaste

- Easiest toothpaste container is a flip top bottle
- The flavor (natural, mint, cinnamon, citrus, etc.) of the toothpaste should be considered (also the texture)
- Place a towel (contrasting color if low vision) on the counter to hold supplies (things won’t roll away)
- If using a toothpaste tube with a cover, turn the cover and remove it
- To prevent it from rolling away, stand it on end or place it in a cup or bowl

3. **Applying toothpaste to toothbrush (correct amount)**
 - Hold toothbrush head between your thumb and index finger
 - Place toothpaste tube at one end of bristles and bring tube across bristles while squeezing slightly—stop when tube drops off other end of toothbrush
 - Or: Squeeze small amount of toothpaste into a small 1 oz. cup and dip bristles in toothpaste in the cup
 - Or: Squeeze small amount of toothpaste onto index finger and place in mouth
 - Using a binder clip on the end of the toothpaste tube, and rolling it and clipping it as the tube empties helps with application
4. **Brushing the teeth (up and down movement)**
 - Brushing teeth is sometimes a scary task, so we need to make it more comfortable
 - Have a story or song made up to share with your child about brushing teeth
 - Make sure the toothbrush is held comfortably in your child's hand
 - Brush hand-under-hand, gradually releasing contact—it will take a lot of time for your child to be independent in the full task of brushing all his/her teeth
 - Practice moving brush up and down on front teeth first (hand-under-hand)
 - As more skill develops, move brush around in mouth
5. **Spitting**
 - First of all, we teach our children not to spit—now we want them to spit
 - Spitting out toothpaste is probably the hardest skill to teach
 - Remind your child not to swallow the toothpaste (it will happen)
 - Many children swallow first and spit after they have swallowed
 - Practice spitting into the sink before adding toothpaste to the mix
6. **Rinsing mouth**
 - Use no toothpaste, just water to rinse mouth at first
 - Teach to purposefully move cheeks by wiggling nose (without water)
 - Teach your child to hold a small amount of water in his/her mouth
 - Finally, move cheeks and move water in mouth and add spitting into the sink
7. **Putting the toothbrush and toothpaste away**
 - Rinse toothbrush and return to storage location
 - Put cover on toothpaste and return to storage location
 - Wipe the counter with the towel and put towel away in hamper

Past Newsletter Topics

Contact your Teacher for the Blind / Visually Impaired or Certified Orientation & Mobility Specialist if you have further questions on the newsletter topic.