



# Mouth care for people with autism

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## Information for patients

This information sheet answers some of the questions you may have about the things you can do to look after your mouth. It gives top tips for people living with autism, including eating and drinking, tooth brushing and visiting the dentist. If you have any other questions, concerns or notice any changes in your mouth, speak to the dental team caring for you.

### How can I care for my mouth?

- Brush teeth at least twice a day (last thing at night and one other time) with a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste containing 1350 to 1500ppm of fluoride.
- Thoroughly clean teeth for at least two minutes. Carefully brush each tooth – front, back and sides, as well as the gum line.
- Spit out after brushing.
- Both manual and powered toothbrushes are effective at cleaning teeth and gums. Choose one with a small head and medium bristles.
- If you use a mouthwash as part of your daily routine, it is important to use it at a different time to brushing. Please discuss this with your dental professional.
- Cut down on how much and how often you have sugary food and drink:
  - ✓ fruit and vegetables are healthy snacks
  - ✓ avoid sugary drinks – milk and water are best
  - ✓ avoid sugary foods
  - ✓ use sugar-free versions of medicines if possible
- Make regular trips to the dentist.
- Limit your intake of tobacco and alcohol to keep your mouth healthy and reduce the risk of mouth cancer.
- Leave dentures out at night to help keep your mouth healthy.

## How can I make mouth care easier?

- Use a specially adapted toothbrush to suit your needs. Adapting the handle can make gripping the brush easier. You can do this with a sponge or a rubber ball. Special brushes such as a three-sided brush can help brush tooth surfaces at the same time.
- Use toothpaste which is flavourless and does not foam (sodium lauryl sulfate (SLS) free). Ask your dentist or pharmacist for advice.
- Choose a time when you or the person you are helping are relaxed.
- Make tooth brushing fun. Use distractions such as music or TV programmes. You can time tooth brushing for two minutes using a timer or the Brush DJ app.
- When helping someone to brush their teeth, stand in front of a mirror so they can see too or show them tooth brushing on someone else – even yourself.
- The easiest way to assist with brushing is for the person to sit in a chair and to stand behind or to the side of them. Support them against your body, cradling their head with one arm, making it easier to brush their teeth safely and comfortably.
- If brushing is difficult, a different part of the mouth can be brushed each day.
- Young children can be sat on a lap to make brushing easier



Adapted easy grip toothbrush



Triple headed toothbrush

## How can I prepare for a visit to the dentist?

Visiting the dentist can be challenging for a person with autism because it is a new experience with different sounds, smells and sensations. Here are a few tips:

- Find pictures to use on a visual timetable or a now and next board to prepare for the visit. You can find images and specific pictures on the widget health website: [www.widget-health.com](http://www.widget-health.com).
- Read a storybook about visiting the dentist.

- Arrange a “hello” visit beforehand, virtually or in person.
- If possible, ask the dental team for photos of themselves, the dental surgery, the waiting room and the entrance, so you know what to expect and can refer back to.
- Book an appointment time that suits you.
- Bring something with you that helps you feel calm in a new place, such as a favourite toy or tablet. Noise cancelling headphones or listening to music can help.
- The dental team will talk to you about how they can help you look after your mouth and can adapt this to suit your needs.
- The dental team may apply a fluoride varnish to your teeth or prescribe high concentration fluoride toothpaste to use at home.

## **Where can I find out further information?**

[Autism Speaks \(www.autismspeaks.org\)](http://www.autismspeaks.org)

[British Society of Paediatric Dentistry \(www.bspd.co.uk\)](http://www.bspd.co.uk)

[Dentocare \(www.dentocare.co.uk\)](http://www.dentocare.co.uk)

[Going to the dentist \(www.autism.org.uk\)](http://www.autism.org.uk)

[Healthier Families \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

[Widget Health \(widget-health.com\)](http://widget-health.com)

You can find images and specific symbol sheets on the [Widget Health website](http://widget-health.com), including:

- [Visiting the dentist](#)
- [In the dentist’s room](#)
- [After seeing the dentist](#)
- [My silver tooth](#)
- [My dental x-ray](#)
- [My daycase operation](#)

## **References**

[Delivering better oral health: an evidence-based toolkit for prevention \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

[The NHS website \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

[Oral health toolkit for adults in care homes \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

## **PALS**

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) is a service that offers support, information and assistance to patients, relatives and visitors. They can also provide help and advice if you have a concern or complaint that staff have not been able to resolve for you. They can also pass on praise or thanks to our teams.

PALS at King's College Hospital, Denmark Hill, London SE5 9RS

Tel: 020 3299 3601

Email: [kch-tr.palsdh@nhs.net](mailto:kch-tr.palsdh@nhs.net)

PALS at Princess Royal University Hospital, Farnborough Common, Orpington, Kent  
BR6 8ND

Tel: 01689 863252

Email: [kch-tr.palspruh@nhs.net](mailto:kch-tr.palspruh@nhs.net)

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