



Maintaining Oral Health

Weakened mouth and throat muscles, weakened hands and arms to brush teeth and tube feeding are all changes which require special consideration of mouth care. Food can easily collect in pockets in the mouth as well as between teeth. Retained food debris, thick mucous and decreased saliva all contribute to poor oral conditions such as too much plaque and tartar, halitosis (bad breath), gingivitis and tooth decay. It is important that you take care of your mouth to prevent harmful bacteria from developing.

Mouth bacteria not only cause bleeding gums, bone loss, mouth and tooth infections but can travel from an infected tooth root into the bloodstream causing life threatening infections such as pericarditis, (inflammation of the membrane around the heart).

There are many products available to make oral care easier. Good oral hygiene can greatly improve your self esteem and dignity.

ORAL HEALTH ISSUES

Here are some issues that you need to be aware of and tips on promoting good oral health.

Going to the Dentist

Not many dentists will know about MND, its effect on your ability to keep your teeth clean, excess saliva or the precautions they should take because of a patient's swallowing problems. Make your dentist

fully aware of these problems. Continue with regular dental cleanings for as long as possible at your usual dental practice. Consult your dental hygienist for preventative home care instructions.

Mouth Freshness

An applicator with lemon and water can be used to keep the mouth fresh. You can also try an oral rinse such as Biotene or non-alcohol mouthwashes.

Furry Tongue

Some people with MND, particularly those with bulbar symptoms, can develop a furry tongue. Water may be used to clean the tongue with an applicator or washcloth. If the tongue appears white for any length of time, consult your doctor or dentist. Sometimes a condition called 'thrush' can develop. It is a fungal infection and is easily treated with antifungal preparations. Short-term relief from the irritation caused by oral thrush can be achieved by rinsing the mouth several times daily with natural live yoghurt or a solution of half a teaspoon of bicarbonate of soda in a cupful of warm (not hot) water.

Saliva Build-Up

Build-up of saliva is a common problem among people with MND who have weakened tongue and throat muscles and are not able to automatically swallow the saliva that builds up in the mouth. Very thick mucus can also build up in the mouth, making the problem worse. This build-up of saliva can cause annoyance and disrupt sleep.

MND Scotland is the only charity funding research and providing care and information for those affected by MND in Scotland.

Relief may come from home remedies, over-the-counter products, and prescription drugs and, in extreme cases, even surgical procedures. Advice should be obtained from your doctor and/or your local pharmacist. A side effect of drugs to relieve a build-up of saliva is "dry mouth." It's a question of finding the right balance for you.

The following have been helpful for managing saliva but check with your doctor or MND Care Team Specialist first as some interventions can sometimes be counter-productive in MND:

- Portable suction machine
- Decongestants and over-the-counter medications used for colds and allergies
- Certain prescription only drugs

Transderm V patches, usually used for motion sickness, also tend to dry up saliva

The following have been shown to be helpful for treating thick mucus:

- Apple juice, grape juice pineapple juice, or hot tea with lemon
- Potassium Iodide solution has been claimed to be effective though it may take one to two weeks. This should only be taken under medical supervision.
- Expectorant cough syrups
- Meat tenderiser mixed with a little water can be used to coat the tongue or can be placed under the tongue
- Papaya extract placed on the tongue may prove helpful

Precautions: Some of the suggestions for saliva management include use of medication. Here are some important

points to keep in mind when taking over the-counter medication:

- Always first talk to your doctor or nurse about medication recommendations before use
- Sleepiness is often the side effect of medications
- Beware that anything containing alcohol can increase muscle weakness, at least temporarily
- Beware of anything that slows breathing
- Before putting any medication, crushed or otherwise in a feeding tube, check with a pharmacist to ensure that it won't harden and clog the tube
- Generic products are usually cheaper

Excess saliva has one advantage! If you have excess saliva and are still able to eat by mouth, mixing more saliva with your food makes it both easier to swallow and digest.

Dry Mouth

Although management of saliva is common in many people with MND, especially those with difficulty swallowing, some are troubled by excessive mouth dryness. A dry mouth can cause thick mucus to form, which may in turn cause serious choking problems.

Excessive dryness is usually caused by one or more of the following:

- Breathing mostly through the mouth, rather than the nose can dry out the lining in your mouth. If you consistently wake up with a dry mouth, thick mucus and/or a sore throat, you may be breathing through your mouth while sleeping

The information in this leaflet is believed to be accurate at the time of production. MND Scotland cannot give detailed medical advice, this leaflet should be regarded only as general background information.

- A side effect from some surgical operations
- Stress from chronic anxiety or depression
- A side effect from some medications
- The natural process of aging
- Smoking

The following have proved helpful for a dry mouth:

- Make a conscious effort to breathe through your nose
- If you suffer from nasal congestion, ask your doctor for assistance (nasal congestion leading to a dry mouth can cause thick mucus to form, which in turn may cause choking problems)
- Increase your liquid intake (ask your SLT and dietician which consistency is best for you)
- Use a vaporiser (clean the vaporiser once a week with vinegar and water)
- Ask your pharmacist about oral rinses, artificial saliva spray, and tablets

ORAL HEALTH DEVICES

Toothbrushes and Flossers

If you have weakened hands and arms, an electric toothbrush is ideal for brushing your teeth. There are a variety of electric brush shapes and price ranges: Oral B, Waterpik Sensonic, Philips Sonicare, Colgate and Crest spin brushes vary from simple rotary brushes to those employing advanced techniques for tooth cleaning. Others may find that an ordinary toothbrush is very helpful for removing the build-up, which occurs on the teeth, particularly after tube feeding. There are many brushes widely available and a soft

bristle brush is always recommended to minimise gum damage. Newer to the market are both manual and electric flossing aids such as the Reach Access, Butler Floss Handle and the Oral B Humming Bird Flosser. The “healthcare for all website” www.healthcare4all.co.uk has a comprehensive listing of flossers, brushes, irrigators and toothpastes.

Proper Brushing Technique:

1. Place the toothbrush at a 45-degree angle to the gum-line.
2. Use a gentle circular motion several times in the same spot.
3. Finish with a sweep of the brush from the gum-line to the chewing surface of the tooth.
4. Repeat this method as you brush from the right to the left side of the mouth.

Also be sure to brush the inner surfaces of the teeth. If a carer is brushing for you, the handle of a soft grip toothbrush could be used as a mouth prop to assist access.

Suction Unit

Another method for moving food caught in pockets of the mouth is a suction unit, which is normally used for removing excess saliva to reduce drool.

Finally

As noted earlier, many dental care professionals may not be familiar with MND and symptoms of the disease that might affect dental treatment. You are encouraged to take this factsheet with you to your dentist or hygienist. Educating them will improve their ability to work with you to promote optimal oral health and treat problems if they occur.

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Further Information

Factsheets

Factsheet 6	Feeding Tubes
Factsheet 30	Communication Strategies
Factsheet 34	Adapting to Swallowing Problems
Factsheet 35	Breathing Matters

Helpful Web Sites:

www.healthcare4all.co.uk

www.colgate.co.uk

www.bsdh.org.uk

www.dentalhealth.org

www.oralb.com/en-UK

www.jnj.com

A commercial retailer of oral health products

Colgate, oral care specialists

British Society for Disability and Oral Health

British Dental Health Foundation

Oral B, a division of Procter and Gamble

Johnson & Johnson, one of the world's largest suppliers of healthcare products.