

## ORAL HYGIENE AND DYSPHAGIA

Oral hygiene will need special attention for individuals diagnosed with a swallowing disorder or dysphagia. An individualized plan must be developed with the dentist or primary care physician (PCP) that includes the necessary steps to complete oral hygiene as well as safeguards due to the individual's specific swallowing difficulty.

Even if a person receives all nutrition and fluids from a feeding tube (nothing by mouth-NPO) or has no teeth (edentulous), oral hygiene is still an important aspect of ensuring good health.

The plan should be individualized; some general guidelines include:

- *Use the least amount of water as possible.*
  - Whatever you are using to clean the mouth (washcloth, Toothette sponge, or toothbrush) squeeze until it is almost dry.
- *Watch how you position the person for care.*
  - Leaning someone back could allow even a small amount of fluid to be aspirated (breathed into the lungs).
  - Improper position may cause gagging and choking.
  - Care should be given at face level (you are face to face with the person).
- *Having oral hygiene completed by a caregiver may be difficult for the person receiving care.*
  - Please be patient with the person.
- *Develop an oral hygiene plan with the dentist or primary care physician (PCP).*
  - Make sure that the plan includes:
    - Specific products (e.g. toothpaste, toothbrush, mouthwash) to be used
    - Positioning
    - Frequency of care
  - This plan should be discussed with the dentist/PCP to determine if plan is or is not working and if changes need to be made. It should be updated annually.

