What Can I Try?

- Use a toothbrush with soft bristles
- Use a smaller toothbrush, such as toddler- or child-size toothbrush to make access easier
- Try a battery-operated toothbrush for stimulating gums and ease of tooth brushing
- Use a timer so it is clear when to stop brushing
- Use favorite music during brushing (Turn music on only when they are cooperating)
- Use first-then “first brush, then _______” (favorite activity) instructions
- Use an activity schedule to show when brushing occurs and what favorite activity comes next
- Make tooth brush easier to hold by attaching a strap or ball to the end

Resources

- **Florida Dental Association**: Dentists Care Project (850) 681-3629 ext. 304 http://www.floridadental.org
- **Kids Dental Health**: http://www.kidshealth.org/kid/stay_healthy/body/teeth.html
- **Nisonger Center Dental Clinic**: http://www.nisonger.osu.edu/dental. (614) 292-3160.

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Oral Well-Being

Why is Oral Health Important?

Good oral health is important for:
- Preventing tooth decay and gum disease
- Speaking clearly
- Eating many foods
- Being accepted socially and at work
- Feeling good about yourself

Why is Oral Health So Difficult?

Many children and adults with disabilities:
- Don’t like to brush, because their mouth and gums are extra sensitive
- Are scared of new places and experiences
- Do not have health insurance that pays for regular dental care or a dentist who will accept Medicaid

Certain disabilities present higher risk for dental problems (for example, Down Syndrome and Cerebral Palsy)

What is the Worst That Can Happen?

Poor oral health can cause:
- Tooth decay, gum disease and/or bad breath
- Severe pain and irritability
- Problems chewing and swallowing
- Early tooth loss from decay or gum disease
- Bone loss from gum disease
- Infection that can spread to other parts of the body, including the heart

And:
- Poor self-esteem and social rejection because of appearance or bad breath
- Behavior problems due to pain
- Problems paying attention and learning at home, at school, or on the job

How do I Support Good Oral Health?

- Teach good brushing habits at a young age
- Be a role model for healthy habits
- Brush twice a day with fluoride toothpaste
- Floss daily
- Visit the dentist at least once a year (every 6 months is best)
- Get a new toothbrush every 6 months and after being sick
- Prepare foods that are low in sugar and high in calcium

How can my Dentist Help?

- Allow extra time for the appointment
- Work slowly
- Break down the procedure for the patient by showing, telling, and doing each step
- Use simple language but speak to patient (not caregiver) as much as possible
- Take breaks, as needed, and praise cooperation
- Allow patients to stay in their wheelchair if they prefer
- Consider beginning with a short appointment and gradually building up treatment time