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HOT TIP
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Northern Health Palliative Care

Mouth Discomfort – Tips for Personal Support Workers

Mouth discomfort develops when the normal tissues of the oral cavity become dry, irritated, and/or infected. There are many causes of mouth discomfort: e.g., medication side-effects, poorly fitting dentures, a weakened immune system.

Providing mouth care regularly is important to help prevent mouth dryness and sores. The preventive mouth care strategies are useful for all people receiving supportive care and are especially important for those at high risk for developing oral thrush infections. Focus on hydrating and lubricating the mouth in people at risk for dry mouth, such as those with limited intake or in who are in their last days and hours. Provide individualized care when a person is not able to manage their own mouth care.

Preventive Strategies	In the Moment	Individualize care
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide mouth care before and after meals. • Remove dentures before providing mouth care. • Brush gently or wipe the mucosa to remove plaque and debris. • Use a soft toothbrush, and if necessary, a specialized toothpaste. • Thrush-infection: soak dentures and toothbrushes in a vinegar or disinfectant solution. Use gloves. • For people resisting mouth care, use creative strategies to complete the task <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - distraction: singing, talking, gentle touching. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer water or other drinks frequently. • Spray the inside of the person’s mouth with cold water. • Offer ice cubes wrapped in a clean washcloth. • Offer slightly thawed popsicles, pineapple chunks, sour candies or chewing gum. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moisten the mouth mucosa gently using mouth swabs. • Offer mouth liquid rinse: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Water, or salt water - Alcohol-free germicidal mouth rinse diluted to half strength with water - Brandy diluted with water to remove crusts and reduce breath odor. - Club soda to loosen materials on mucosa and teeth. • Apply lubricant to the oral mucosa using a swab, after the mouth has been cleaned and rinsed. • Apply lip balm after applying the lubricant • Use humidifier in the room to moisten the person’s dry airways. • Invite the family to participate in mouth care.

Reference: Kath Murray (2014). Module 4J: Mouth Discomfort. Integrating a Palliative Approach: Essentials for Personal Support Workers. Life and Death Matters, p.93-96