

Oral Care Is Pneumonia Prevention

The daily protocol for patients and caregivers

Read this first:

Aspiration pneumonia isn't caused by food alone. It is caused by oral bacteria that 'hitch-hikes' along with whatever food or liquid, or saliva enters a person's lungs during the aspiration event. The bacteria living in an unclean mouth is the same bacteria behind aspiration pneumonia. If you're at risk of aspiration, (including **silent** aspiration) your oral bacterial load directly shapes your risk of pneumonia.

When it comes to oral care and aspiration, **a toothbrush is now medical equipment.**

The daily protocol

- **Brush your teeth AND tongue** with a soft-bristle toothbrush and toothpaste at least twice a day, in the morning and night. If you are deemed high-risk, brush your teeth before every meal when possible.
- **Mouthwash is NOT a substitute.** The mechanical scrubbing of bristles is what removes the bacteria. If mouthwash is recommended by your provider, an alcohol-free antibacterial rinse can be added to the regiment, but should not replace brushing.
- **Dentures: cleaned thoroughly EVERY day. Take them out at night, EVERY night.** Dentures left in overnight trap bacteria against soft tissue. This significantly raises your pneumonia risk.

For caregivers:

If your loved one can not manage their oral care independently, it becomes part of their medical care. Please build it into the daily routine the same way you would their medications. This is not optional, and it is one of the most protective things you will ever do for them.

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min**

The single most protective thing you can do every day costs almost nothing and takes three minutes.

Brush. Thoroughly. Every day.

Meaghan Arnold & SSNR for Myositis Support and Understanding

This handout does not replace individualized evaluation by a speech-language pathologist or your medical team.

Myositis Support and Understanding