

## Poor oral health is associated with frailty in older adults: Top 10 tips

Older adults can suffer from poor oral health due to conditions like tooth decay(caries), periodontal disease, and edentulism, among others. These issues accumulate throughout the life course and can be exacerbated by infrequent visits to oral health professionals, compared with the general population. Therefore we would recommend frequent visits to a dental care professional for oral health checks.

Good oral hygiene is a large part of good oral health. Brushing twice a day with fluoride toothpaste and reducing the intake of sugary food and drinks should be promoted to patients.

There is strong evidence that frail populations would have a lower incidence of pneumonia after regular oral hygiene interventions which include use of chlorhexidine gel or mouthwash

Tooth loss and accumulation of oral problems have been associated with high respiratory mortality in ventilated or community living and hospital-based patients

Respiratory medications, such as inhalers +/- steroids, impact oral health and oral health checks are recommended

Bisphosphonates (commonly taken for osteoporosis )have been linked with reduced bony healing following tooth removal.

Patients prescribed bisphosphonates should be seen by a general dental practitioner prior to starting bisphosphonate treatment.

Older or people with frailty may struggle with manual dexterity. These patients should be recommended special oral hygiene aids such as larger handles and possibly high dose fluoride toothpaste.

High dose fluoride toothpaste paste has been found effective in treating caries (decay) in elderly patients.

**Finding an NHS dentist** Your clients may have visited a dental practice previously and there are advantages of continuing with the same dental practice as the client will be familiar with the dental team and the environment. It is recommended that every client has a dentist-patient relationship with a General Dental Practice. If your clients don't regularly see a dentist, then your local dental practice may be able to help. You may have contact with local dental practices or know of one through word of mouth. Alternatively, please see the information below:

**NHS Dental Services - Useful contacts** Useful dental contacts for access to NHS dental services in Lancashire and South Cumbria are shown below.

#### Non-urgent dental care

To find an NHS dentist in a General Dental Practice visit: [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk). Go to: Service-Search and click on: Find a dentist OR Call the Lancashire Dental Helpline on 0300 1234 010 or South Cumbria Dental Helpline on 01539 716822

#### Urgent dental care

For any urgent or emergency dental care, call 0300 1234 010.

#### Specialist dental care

Most vulnerable older people can receive their dental care in a dental practice. A dental surgery is often the most suitable and safest place for dental care to take place. For a small number of people, some or all of their dental care can't be provided in general dental practice and they need a referral to special care dental services.

Criteria for specialist dental care:

Medical History: Client has a progressive medical condition, unstable mental health or severe dental phobia that requires specialist monitoring or shared care with medical practitioner

Behavioural:, Client has a disability or impairment that severely limits their ability to cooperate with clinical examination

Access:, Client needs ambulance transport and specialist equipment e.g. wheelchair tipper or hoist

If you think a client in your care requires specialist dental care, call the Lancashire and South Cumbria dental helpline on 0300 1234 010 for further guidance and support.

Domiciliary care

A very small proportion of clients need care on a domiciliary basis.

Criteria for domiciliary care:

- People confined to bed, oxygen therapy or fed via Percutaneous Endoscopic Gastrostomy (PEG) tube
- People unable to be transported by wheelchair and taxi-ambulance transport only
- People with advanced dementia who are not able to consent to or cooperate with treatment

A very limited amount of dental care can be safely carried out in a care home setting and for this reason every effort will be made to see your residents in a dental setting.

NHS dental charges

Information about NHS dental charges is available on: <https://www.nhs.uk/common-healthquestions/dental-health/what-is-included-in-each-nhs-dental-band-charge/>

Many older people need to pay for their dental treatment. NHS dental treatment is divided into three bands. These bands each cover different complexities of dental care provided. They are described below. Charges vary by band.

