Collaborative Regional Benchmarking Group

Oral Care in Critical Care

Aim: To provide guidance on oral care for patients in Critical Care
Scope: All adult patients in Critical Care

ASSESS ORAL HYGEINE

- Using appropriate assessment tool[1]
- Within **6 hours** of admission[1]
- At least **12 hourly** thereafter [1]

Each shift assess and document

- Condition of teeth/dentures
- Condition of gums
- Ulceration
- Oral Candida
- Saliva and halitosis
- Piercings
- Debris
- Device related lip integrity

Example assessment tool on page 2

Seek advice from senior medical team, Dentists, Dental Hygienist or Oral/Maxo-facial surgeons in the case of oral surgery, trauma, post radiotherapy or chemotherapy or allergies to fluoride.

Standard Oral Care

1	Patients mouth should be assessed within 6 hours of admission to critical care and reassessed at least every 12 hours thereafter[1].
2	Brush teeth, gums and tongue twice daily with a soft toothbrush and toothpaste (fluoride/non foaming)[1]. More often may be necessary for those patients receiving oxygen therapy.
3	Use oral swabs to clean and moisturise teeth and oral cavity at least every 4 hours, in-between brushing[1].
4	Apply water-based moisturiser/lip balm at least every 4 hours[1]
5	Dentures should be cleaned a minimum of once daily with a toothbrush and soaked in denture cleaner / water when not in use[1].

Additional Considerations

Consider, with medical advice:

- artificial saliva for dry mouth[1] (every 4 hours)
- topical analgesia for painful mouth
- topical anti-fungal liquid for oral candida
- chlorhexidine (or cetylpyridinium chloride) may be used if prescribed and in line with your local policy e.g. after cardiac surgery, intubation, patients with increased risk factors[1,4,5]

Please see your units full guidelines for more information

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	References
1	Collins T, Plowright C, Gibson V, Stayt L, Clarke S, Caisley J, Watkins CH, Hodges E, Leaver G, Leyland S, McCready P, Millin S, Platten J, Scallon M, Tipene P, Wilcox G. British Association of Critical Care Nurses: Evidence-based consensus paper for oral care within adult critical care units. Nurs Crit Care. 2021 Jul;26(4):224-233.
2	Winning L, Lundy FT, Blackwood B, McAuley DF, El Karim I. Oral health care for the critically ill: a narrative review. Crit Care. 2021 Oct 1;25(1):353.
3	HEE (2019) Mouth Care Matters. A Guide for Hospital Healthcare Professionals. Second Edition
4	Price, R., MacLennan, G. and Glen, J. (2014) 'Selective digestive or oropharyngeal decontamination and topical oropharyngeal chlorhexidine for prevention of death in general intensive care: systematic review and network meta-analysis', *BMJ*, 348(g2197), pp. 1–11.
5	London Health Sciences Centre (2025) *Procedure: oral care in intubated or trached patients*. London, ON: LHSC Critical Care Trauma Centre. Available at: https://www.lhsc.on.ca/critical-care-trauma-centre/procedure-oral-care-in-intubated-or-trached-patients