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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For more information or to print additional copies visit http://flfcic.org or http://nisonger.osu.edu/bhip/
**Oral Well-Being**

**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)

**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

**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