

CHANGING IT UP:

How to modify your brushing routine when your body just won't cooperate

With physical limitations, taking proper care of your teeth can sometimes feel like it is not worth the effort. But wait... did you know that problems in your mouth can lead to health issues ranging from annoying to serious? And that people with disabilities are more likely to experience dental problems? Luckily, brushing your teeth daily can help you stay healthy. When body movements are limited, toothbrushing can be tough. That's why we put together these ideas to help.



Trouble with Spitting/Swallowing?

Try This...

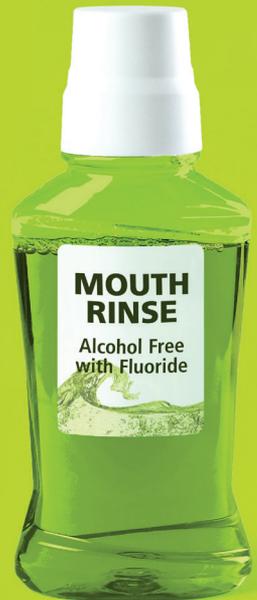
- Use less toothpaste. You only need a pea-sized amount to do the job.
- Consider using a suction device while brushing*
 - Suction devices can be prescribed by your doctor and may be covered by insurance
 - Use a suction toothbrush that attaches to the hose*



Trouble Gagging/Choking While Brushing?

Try This...

- Use less toothpaste. You only need a pea-sized amount to do the job.
- Use non-foaming toothpaste; without SLS (Sodium lauryl sulfate) in the ingredients*
- Keep your head in a neutral or downward position while brushing
- Use a wet toothbrush without toothpaste. Follow with alcohol free mouth rinse with fluoride.
- Use a smaller, youth size toothbrush
- Experiment with brushing at different times of the day. Some people gag less in the evening.



Trouble Putting Toothpaste on Your Toothbrush?

Try This...

- Squeeze toothpaste onto your tongue and then transfer it to your toothbrush
- Hold the toothbrush in your teeth and then apply the toothpaste
- Place the opened tube of toothpaste on the counter slightly over basin. Hold your toothbrush under the tube. Use your fingers or side of your hand to squeeze out the toothpaste.
- Hold the toothbrush between the thumb and forefinger of your weak hand, apply toothpaste with strong hand.
- Use toothpaste in a pump dispenser*
- Use a chip bag clip or toothpaste squeezer*



Trouble Flossing?

Try This...

- Tie the floss in a loop for easier handling.
- Use a floss handle*
- Use an oral irrigator, such as Waterpik, to flush out debris*



Trouble Reaching Your Mouth with a Toothbrush?

Try This...

- Bend the neck of your toothbrush handle by softening it under hot water
- Lengthen handle of your toothbrush
 - Purchase specialty products*
 - Attach something wood or plastic like a ruler, popsicle stick, or tongue depressor
- Bend over and bring your face to toothbrush instead of bringing the brush up to your face
- Prop the elbow of your arm holding the toothbrush on the counter, a box, towel or other item while brushing



Trouble Opening a Toothpaste Tube?

Try This...

- Use toothpaste tubes with flip tops
- Use toothpaste in a pump dispenser*



Trouble Holding Your Mouth Open While Brushing?

Try This...

- Use a toothbrush that can clean quicker, such as a power toothbrush or 3-sided toothbrush*
- Use something to prop your mouth open
 - Purchase specialty mouth prop*
 - Tape together several tongue depressors



Trouble Holding a Toothbrush?

Try This...

- Use a power toothbrush*
- Add a bigger handle to your toothbrush
 - Purchase specialty products*
 - Wrap the handle with a washcloth with a rubber band, a bicycle handle, aluminum foil, gripped shelf liner, or pipe foam insulation
- Use a wide elastic band or Velcro strap designed to hold utensils*
- Use a youth toothbrush if adult size is too heavy or big



Trouble Trapping Food?

Try This...

- Rinse with water, sweep your mouth with a finger wrapped in gauze or disposable foam applicator swab*
- Ask someone to check your mouth after each meal or dose of medicine

Trouble Standing at the Sink?

Try This...

- Choose a sink with enough room to sit on a tall stool
- Create knee clearance under the sink so wheelchair users can use sink facing forward
- Sit on the toilet and spit in the sink or a cup
- Consider brushing in a place outside the bathroom
 - At a table with a towel, bowl and cup of water
 - In bed or wheelchair with a cup of water on your lap or around you



Trouble with Uncontrolled Arm Movements?

Try This...

- Use a weighted glove* or toothbrush
- Prop your elbows on the counter while brushing

Here are some other tips that can help keep your mouth healthy:

- Always brush before bed and use a toothpaste that contains fluoride.
- Consider brushing your teeth in the shower - Easy clean up!
- Avoid rinsing for at least 20 minutes after brushing to maximize the effectiveness of the fluoride toothpaste.
- See a dental professional regularly. If you have concerns, call your dental office or local safety net clinic right away.*
- If you have dentures, try using a denture soak. When brushing them, make sure to put a towel in the bottom of the sink so they won't break if dropped.
- Many medications can make your mouth feel dry. Dry mouth can be uncomfortable, and it increases your risk for cavities. Look for over the counter remedies and ask your doctor or dentist for ways to minimize the impact.*
- Rinse with water after using an inhaler or taking liquid medications.

If your mouth and teeth are not cleaned daily, you are more likely to get cavities and gum disease. Taking care of your mouth also helps you have a brighter smile and fresher breath, which can make it easier to get a job, enjoy relationships, and feel better about yourself. Don't be afraid to try new things to keep brushing simple, comfortable and a part of your daily routine. Consider asking for help from others who support your efforts to keep healthy. Your local Center for Independent Living* or medical or dental professionals may have additional advice.

*See Resources:

www.oralhealthkansas.org/AdultsDisabilities.html

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Disability and Health Program
kansans with disabilities can be healthy



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