A clean mouth and properly functioning teeth are essential for physical and mental well-being. Research indicates that a clean mouth prevents pneumonia, gum disease, and helps prevent heart disease.

Oral care helps prevent infections in the mouth by removing food particles and plaque and it stimulates the circulation to the gums. Oral care also eliminates bad tastes in the mouth so food is more appetizing and it prevents halitosis.
Many factors influence the need for oral care. It is up to the RN to decide what type of oral care is needed and how often. Oral care can include brushing, flossing, and rinsing, and is essential for the prevention of plaque build-up, inflammation, and infection.
ORAL HYGIENE

Who needs oral care? Both conscious and unconscious patients will need oral care.

Oral care is usually done at least twice a day, but most dentists recommend brushing after each meal.

If the patient is unconscious, oral care will be needed more frequently. Unconscious patients usually breathe through the mouth, causing secretions to dry.

The nurse is responsible for offering patients oral hygiene assistance, from preparing needed supplies to actually brushing a patient’s teeth.
**Types of Oral Care**

- **Brushing** – which cleanses the teeth of food particles, plaque, and bacteria.
- **Flossing** – removes tartar that collects at the gum line.
- **Rinsing** – removes dislodged food particles and excessive toothpaste.
- **Rinsing** can also freshen breath, prevent or control tooth decay, and prevent or reduce gingivitis.
• Handle dentures carefully to prevent damage; hold with a washcloth or paper towel.

• Brush dentures daily with toothpaste or per patient preference.

• When not in the patients mouth, store them in a clean container with cool water to prevent warping.
Assessment

- Ensure patient privacy.
- Assess the patient’s risk for oral hygiene problems.
- Determine the patient’s oral hygiene practices and willingness to attend to hygiene needs. If unconscious, have suction equipment available.
- Assess the patient’s ability to hold and manipulate the toothbrush.
- Hold the toothbrush at a 45 degree angle when brushing the teeth.
WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- Ask the patient to describe proper oral hygiene techniques and recommended frequency.
- Ask the patient if any area of the mouth feels uncomfortable or irritated.
- Assess, treat, and reassess pain according to institution standard.
Document the following in EMR: Procedure; condition of oral cavity; bleeding, pain, or presence of lesions; and patient education.

Oral care needs to be documented in one of two areas. The first place to document is under the ‘Nursing’ tab, under ADL’s. The second place is under the ‘Vitals/I&O’ tab.

Oral Care is shared with the ‘Vitals/I&O,’ and ‘Nursing’ configuration, so if you document it in one place it will flow into the other; there is no need to double chart.
   http://www.health.gov:80/communication/literacy/default.htm

2. AMA/Health Literacy Resources.
   http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/no-index/about-ama/9913.shtml

   http://www.AskMe3.org

   http://mns.elservierperformancemanager.com