A Self-Advocate’s Guide To Dental Health

Created by the Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council.
Dental or oral health is about your teeth, gums and mouth.

Bad dental health can cause infections and larger problems throughout your whole body.

What is dental health?

Having healthy teeth makes you feel and look good.

There are a lot of germs that live in your mouth. If you don’t take care of your mouth, your teeth and gums can get sick and hurt. Germs can enter your blood and make other parts of your body sick.

Plaque is a sticky, slimy build up on your teeth. Plaque is made up mostly of the germs that cause tooth decay.

Why is dental health important?

A healthy mouth = A healthy body!

Individuals with disabilities often do not get good dental care.
How do I take care of my mouth?

- Brush your teeth twice a day for 2 minutes.
- Use a water pick or an electric toothbrush.
- Try to floss once a day between your teeth.
- Rinse and gargle with mouthwash.
- Drink lots of water, especially after eating.
- Visit the dentist every 6 months.
- Avoid smoking or chewing tobacco and drinking sugary drinks.

You can also add a larger or longer handle to your toothbrush. It may make it easier to hold and control the brush!

If you have dry mouth use a mouthwash without alcohol.

Keep track of how your mouth feels. If you have pain, call a dentist.

Pay attention to these warning signs:

- Toothaches.
- Bad breath.
- Pain when you chew.
- Bleeding gums.
- Sensitivity to hot and cold foods.
- Jaw pain, grinding your teeth, or clenching your jaw.
- If your dentures don’t fit or hurt while you wear them.
- Loose teeth.
There are 2 main reasons to go to the dentist:

**Prevention:** To get our teeth cleaned and make sure they are healthy.

**Repair:** To fix something that hurts or is broken.

Here are the people you may see in your dental office:

**Dental Hygienist:** Will check and clean your teeth before the dentist comes to look at them. They may take pictures of your teeth to help the dentist see everything clearly.

**Dentist:** The dentist checks your teeth and fixes any problems. They use special tools to make sure your teeth stay strong and healthy.

**Oral Surgeon:** An oral surgeon has extra special skills to help fix more challenging problems with your teeth. Your dentist may send you to one.

Here are some tools that may go into your mouth:

- **Water Rinse**
- **Drill**
- **Mirror**
- **Suction Tool**
- **Pick**
- **Dental Floss**
Here are some tips to help you plan your visit:

- Arrive to your appointment at least 15 minutes early.
- Bring a friend or support person with you.
- Take a list of your medications. Some drugs may be hard on your teeth or give you “dry mouth.”
- Know your medical and dental history to share and bring any concerns about your mouth.
- If you need to get a tooth fixed, ask why and how they will fix it.
- Ask the dental office to check how much it will cost to clean and fix your teeth before you have anything done.
- Write down any questions that you have.
What can I do if I am scared to go to the Dentist?

- Remember to breathe.
- Listen to music.
- Wear noise cancelling headphones.
- Ask to watch a movie.
- Close your eyes or wear sunglasses.
- Ask for medicine to numb your teeth and gums.
- Get a tour of the office/doctor before you go to the appointment.
- Bring a friend or support person into the exam room with you.
- With the help of your dentist and doctor, you may get medicine to help you relax:
  - Pills for anxiety or to relax muscles.
  - “Laughing gas” (Nitrous oxide) through a mask.
  - Sedation to put you to sleep.

Many of us have had scary or bad visits with dentists.

Most dentists want to help us if we have pain, tooth decay (cavity), or a broken tooth.

It is your right to get good dental care.

You have the right to ask questions about your oral health until you understand what you need to know to make good choices about your body.

If you are not happy with your dentist, you have the right to look for a new one.

It is your right to get good dental care.
How do I find a dentist?

It is often very hard to find a dentist. And often you have to wait a long time to get an appointment.

Your dental health is important. Here are some tips to find a dentist:

- Ask a friend or family member for the name of their dentist.
- Check with the State Department of Health for dental clinics at community health centers.
- Get a list of local dental providers from Medicaid and your insurance company.

How do I pay to take care of my teeth?

Paying for dental work can cost a lot of money. A lot of people do not go to the dentist because they cannot pay.

You can pay for the dentist using:

- Private insurance
- Pay out of your own pocket
- Medicaid
- State and federal grants
- GoFundMe or online fundraising

Resources to help you pay for a dentist in Vermont:

- One-Time Funding from your agency
- Reach out to dental schools and community health centers
- CapStone for Teeth
- DDSD Dental Fund

Scan this QR Code or visit: http://www.ihppvt.org
Use these two pages to help you with your next dentist appointment.

My Dentist
Name: ____________________________
Phone Number: ____________________
Address: __________________________

I want to ask about...
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What is The Inclusive Healthcare Partnership Project?

The creators of the Inclusive Healthcare Partnership Project (IHPP) believe that everyone should have the tools they need to support their own health. This includes health information that is easy to understand. It also means that healthcare providers are prepared to work with patients with a wide range of disabilities.

IHPP has two goals. First, to create plain language health information designed by and for people with developmental disabilities. Second, to help nurses, doctors, and other providers communicate effectively with neurodiverse patients.

Want to learn more about this health topic? Want to view our sources?

Scan this QR Code or visit: http://www.ihppvt.org