

How to care for people's oral health in care homes

Many care home operators will know that the Care Quality Commission (CQC) has made it a mission to improve the standards of oral healthcare in care homes since they published their report, *Smiling Matters*, in 2019 and a progress report in 2023. But how can you excel in this area? This post explores best practice all homes can implement.

Why oral health?

Apart from the CQC focus, there are other clear reasons to make looking after residents' oral health a priority. As well as going towards maintaining people's dignity, it can also improve residents' overall health.

People with poor oral hygiene can be in a significant amount of pain from ulcers, sores and infections that might be going untreated; this might make it difficult for them to eat, or they might become sensitive to hot or cold food and drinks, potentially leading to malnourishment and/or dehydration.

There's also a psychological factor to consider, as people might feel too self-conscious or too uncomfortable to get involved in conversation or activities, which could lead to feelings of loneliness and isolation, depression and withdrawal.

For these reasons and many more, it is important to always consider how we can better look after residents' oral health.

Making improvements

So how do we do this? What does best practice look like?

CQC wants to see an increase in Oral Health Champions in care homes, so that is a great place to start. [This article in CMM Magazine](#) is written by Oral Health Champion at Nellsar and goes into detail on what can be done to improve people's oral care.

Once an oral health champion has been appointed, ask them to find a local dentist surgery that will offer a dentist to come into



the care home at regular intervals to see any residents who would like to be seen. They can help to identify and tackle any problems that might already exist.

To prevent further problems, it's a good idea to come up with a system that the oral health champion can implement to check residents always have suitable toothbrushes, floss and toothpaste. You could also ensure you're thinking about which residents might need extra support to brush their teeth, either physically or with remembering to do so.

As ever, training can't be ignored. All staff interacting with residents can be trained to look out for warning signs such as withdrawal, avoiding eating, or bad breath. There should be a process in place if a staff member raises a concern, so that the resident in question can be checked and, if necessary, treated quickly.

The future of oral care in care homes

Four years after the publication of its original *Smiling Matters* report, CQC found that out of 50 care homes, only 28% had appointed an oral health champion as recommended. Though a small sample, this suggests there's a long way to go in enhancing the oral health of people living in care homes. However, some simple steps can make a big difference and not only will CQC approve, but the quality of life of the people you support may improve too. For information on the oral health reports published by CQC, visit the CMM website and search 'smiling matters', and find more tips and information on managing people's oral hygiene here.