

THERE IS NO HEALTH WITHOUT GOOD ORAL HEALTH*

By Carol Van Aernam, RDH, BA

Question: Why is Oral Care so Important?

Answer: Daily brushing and flossing disrupts the bacteria (plaque) in our mouth that causes cavities and gum disease. We need to provide oral care at LEAST twice daily for those with teeth or dentures.

Question: What happens if you do not provide daily oral care?

Answer: Plaque irritates the gums and allows the bacteria to enter the blood stream which:

- Increases your risk by 70% for a heart attack or stroke, or other heart problems.
- Makes diabetes more difficult to control.
- Stresses your immune system.

Bacteria in the oral cavity on your teeth, gums, or dentures may:

- Increase the risk for aspiration pneumonia by 50%.
- Increase your risk for dental cavities.
- Increase bad breath.
- Affect your nutrition when it causes loose, broken or missing teeth, or sores in your mouth.

*Surgeon General, Report on Oral Health, 2000

All health and long term service and support (LTSS) professionals/caregivers are expected to work within their Scopes of Practice or job descriptions as defined by the State or employer. Family caregivers are encouraged to contact the dental or medical provider before making changes to a loved one's care plan.

**DAILY ORAL CARE =
INFECTION CONTROL**

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Meet Carol, a Registered Dental Hygienist and a Mouth Care Matters consultant and instructor.

Carol Van Aernam is a Mouth Care Matters (MCM) instructor and consultant for Iowa CareGivers. She plays a key role in planning, promoting, and teaching MCM. Carol worked in private dental practice for several years and 34 years for the Veterans Administration and Central Iowa Health Care System as a dental hygienist. She specializes in geriatric care and has presented programs at the local and national levels to those who work in direct care, dietitians, dentists, dental hygienists, and other caregivers. In addition, Carol served as an adjunct instructor for Des Moines Area Community College (DMACC) and the University of Iowa.

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