

# Better dental health starts with understanding.

Comfort-first dental care for people with special needs



Dental visits can be challenging for people with special needs, but luckily, simple accommodations can make a big difference. With a little planning and support, you can help your loved one feel more comfortable and get the care they deserve.

Special needs can include physical, developmental, cognitive, sensory or behavioral conditions that may require extra care.<sup>1</sup> Developing trust and creating a comfortable office experience are keys to getting the best possible outcome. People who have disabilities may need extra help to achieve and maintain good oral and overall health.<sup>2</sup> No matter your situation, daily care plus professional care equals the best chances for a healthy mouth<sup>3</sup>.

People with developmental disabilities are at a higher risk for dental disease<sup>4</sup>. Some reasons for this include the following:

- Using medication that has a high sugar content or causes a dry mouth. Bacteria thrive in dry mouths and are fueled by sugars.
- Eating a special diet of food that is soft, pureed or high in starch. These foods tend to stick to teeth and can be more difficult to remove.
- Being unable to participate in regular brushings at home or at the dentist due to physical limitations or behavioral challenges.

## Caregivers can help in these ways:

- **Brushing daily:** You may need to assist or modify the toothbrush to accommodate your loved one's needs.
- **Flossing regularly:** Tools such as floss holders or picks can make this easier.
- **Limiting snacking and sugary drinks:** Healthy foods and drinks, such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains and water, are good for the mouth and the body.<sup>4</sup>
- **Explaining what you're going to do:** Playing music or telling jokes can make caring for your loved one's oral health care needs enjoyable and make the time fly by.<sup>4</sup>
- **Scheduling routine care:** Disease prevention and early detection are keys to maintaining oral and overall health.
- **Sharing complete medical history with the provider:** This helps tailor care to your loved one's needs.

## When scheduling a dental visit, share<sup>5</sup>:

- any fears or sensitivities your loved one has;
- what accommodations can make for a more comfortable visit;
- the time of day that is best for your loved one; and
- whether your loved one uses a wheelchair or has physical needs.

Visit [myCigna.com](https://myCigna.com) to find a dentist who understands special health care needs.



1. American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry. "Management of dental patients with special health care needs." The Reference Manual of Pediatric Dentistry. Chicago, Ill.: American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry; 2024:343–50. 2025. <https://www.aapd.org/research/oral-health-policies--recommendations/management-of-dental-patients-with-special-health-care-needs/>. Last accessed May 9, 2025.
2. National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research. "Developmental Disabilities & Oral Health." National Institutes of Health. Last reviewed August 2023. <https://www.nidcr.nih.gov/health-info/developmental-disabilities>
3. Mouthhealthy. "The Caregiver's Guide to Dental Health." American Dental Association. Last accessed April 22, 2025. <https://www.mouthhealthy.org/life-stages/adults/caregivers-guide-adults-over-60>
4. Mouthhealthy. "The Caregiver's Guide to Dental Health." American Dental Association. Last accessed April 22, 2025. <https://www.mouthhealthy.org/life-stages/adults/caregivers-guide-adults-over-60>
5. Malik KE & Sarvas EW. "Oral Health Care for Children with Developmental Disabilities." Healthy Children.org, from the American Academy of Pediatrics. Last updated July 11, 2024. <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/oral-health/Pages/Oral-Health-Challenges-for-Children-with-Disabilities.aspx>

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