

Master CNA Mouth Care for Test Success

Prevent pneumonia and demonstrate professional competence. This checklist covers both natural teeth and denture care with provider-specific requirements for 2025 testing.

Why This Skill Saves Lives

Proper oral care reduces pneumonia rates by 31% in healthcare facilities. Your testing skills directly translate to preventing life-threatening infections in real patient care.

Aspiration Prevention = Life or Death

Upright positioning prevents rinse water from flowing toward the throat. Lying flat during mouth care can cause choking and aspiration pneumonia - automatic test failure.

Automatic Failure Points

Never do these: Position patient flat, use hot water on dentures, use regular toothpaste on dentures, force care on resistant patients, leave dentures dry, skip hand hygiene steps, or allow equipment contamination.

Managing Patient Resistance

Use "Tell-Show-Do" approach: explain briefly, show the brush, proceed slowly. Offer choices like "mint or plain toothpaste?" Never force care - document resistance and try different approach.

Step 1: Preparation & Supply Gathering

- Gather supplies before patient contact: soft-bristled toothbrush, toothpaste, emesis basin, towel, cup with water, gloves
- Denture-specific supplies: denture cleanser (not toothpaste), labeled container, gauze for grip, sink towel protection
- Check water temperature - comfortably warm, test on your wrist
- Use COOL water only for dentures (hot water warps denture materials)
- Organize supplies to prevent contamination during procedure

Step 2: Patient Communication & Privacy

- Knock and introduce yourself professionally
- Explain procedure: "I'm going to help clean your teeth/dentures to keep your mouth healthy"
- Provide privacy by closing door/curtains
- Position bed at comfortable working height

Step 3: Patient Positioning & Safety

- Position patient 75-90° upright (NNAAP requirement - no flexibility)
- Position patient 60-90° upright (Prometric acceptable range)
- Position per care plan requirements (Headmaster - typically upright)
- Place towel across patient's chest for protection
- Position emesis basin under chin for rinsing

Step 4: Hand Hygiene & Infection Control

- Perform handwashing at sink (NNAAP requires actual handwashing)
- Use ABHR unless "with handwashing" specified (Headmaster preference)
- Apply standard precautions throughout (Prometric continuous scoring)
- Don clean gloves before handling toothbrush or touching oral area

Step 5: Natural Teeth Cleaning Technique

- Apply small amount of toothpaste to soft-bristled brush
- Brush all chewing surfaces with gentle back-and-forth motions
- Clean tongue side of teeth (lingual surfaces) systematically
- Clean cheek side of teeth (buccal surfaces) thoroughly
- Include gum line with gentle circular motions
- Clean tongue and inner cheeks gently

Step 6: Denture Removal & Preparation

- Line sink with towel to prevent breakage if dropped
- Fill sink partially with cool water for cushioning
- Use gauze or tissue for better grip when removing dentures
- Remove upper denture first, then lower denture
- Handle dentures gently to prevent damage or injury

Step 7: Denture Cleaning Process

- Use denture cleanser or mild soap (NEVER regular toothpaste)
- Brush all surfaces: teeth, gum side, and edges
- Rinse thoroughly with cool water to remove all cleanser
- Place cleaned dentures in labeled container with clean water
- Keep dentures moist at all times to prevent warping

Step 8: Oral Tissue Care (Denture Patients)

- Clean gums gently with soft brush or gauze
- Clean tongue and palate with gentle strokes
- Remove any denture adhesive residue
- Check for sores, irritation, or swelling

Step 9: Rinsing & Completion (Natural Teeth)

- Offer water for rinsing mouth
- Hold emesis basin to catch rinse water
- Never allow patient to swallow excess toothpaste
- Wipe patient's mouth and chin gently

Step 10: Equipment Care & Storage

- Rinse toothbrush thoroughly under running water
- Ensure emesis basin is completely dry (Prometric requirement)
- Empty, rinse, and dry emesis basin completely
- Return equipment to designated storage area (Headmaster standard)
- Dispose of disposable items properly

Step 11: Final Safety & Documentation

- Remove gloves by turning inside out
- Perform handwashing at sink after glove removal (NNAAP requirement)
- Leave patient in comfortable position
- Place call light within patient reach
- Return bed to low, safe position
- Document care provided and any observations

Step 12: Professional Communication Scripts

- "I'm going to help clean your teeth to keep your mouth healthy"
- "This helps prevent infection and keeps you comfortable"
- "I'll be gentle and tell you what I'm doing"
- Maintain conversational tone throughout procedure
- Report any oral problems: sores, bleeding, or unusual odor