

November 2024



Oral Health Awareness



Oral health affects our physical and mental health. There is a link between poor oral health and long-term, chronic diseases such as stroke, heart disease (cardiovascular disease), diabetes, and respiratory disease. Oral health impacts how we socialize, how we look, how we talk, and what we eat (6).

Oral health and individuals with developmental disabilities (DD)

There are many risk factors for poor oral health among individuals with DD. Individuals with DD often need assistance caring for their teeth and gums (oral hygiene) and poor oral health is common (6). We hope you will review the Office of Integrated Health's (OIH) [Dental Health Awareness Health & Safety Alert](#) to learn more!

Cavities (Caries)

A cavity (caries) can occur when food and drink containing sugar (carbohydrates) leaves a coating on teeth called plaque. Germs (bacteria) live on plaque and produce acids which cause decay (breakdown) of the outer layer of the tooth (enamel). This decay creates a tiny hole or cavity (caries) in the tooth (2) (3). Routine oral hygiene (brushing teeth and flossing) and regular visits to the dentist can reduce plaque and lower risk of a cavity (caries) (2).

Dry mouth (xerostomia) can increase risk of tooth decay. Xerostomia is a common side effect of many mental health and diabetes medications (1). Drinking fluids regularly and avoiding spicy, dry, sticky, and sugary foods can help reduce dry mouth symptoms and can also lower risk of a cavity (carie) (1) (2).

Resources

- Virginia Department of Health <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/oral-health/resources/>
- Virginia Health Care Foundation <https://www.vhcf.org/looking-for-dental-care/>
- Community Dental Care
 - Remote Area Medical <https://www.ramusa.org/schedule/>
 - Virginia Dental Association Foundation <https://www.vdaf.org/need-help.html>

Please direct questions or concerns regarding the Office of Integrated Health Supports Network "Health Trends" newsletter to communitynursing@dbhds.virginia.gov

References

1. American Dental Association. (2023, April). *Xerostomia (dry mouth)*.
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024, May). *About cavities*.
3. Cleveland Clinic (2023). *Cavities*.
4. Gonzalez, E.E., Nathe, C.N., Logothetis, D.D., Pizanis, V.G. & Sanchez-Dils, E. (2012). Training caregivers: Disabilities and dental hygiene. *International Journal of Dental Hygiene*, 11, 293-297.
5. Selbera, L. M., Boyd, L. D., Vineyard, J., & Smallidge, D. L. (2021). Impact of oral health education on the knowledge, behaviors, attitudes, and self-efficacy of caregivers for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. *The Journal of Dental Hygiene*, 95(2), 21-27.
6. Wilson, J. J., Lina, Z., Villarosa, A., & Georgea, A. (2019). Oral health status and reported oral health problems in people with intellectual disability: A literature review. *Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disability*, 44(3), 292-304.

Care Team

Good oral health is a team effort! Individuals with DD, their caregiver(s), and their dental team must work together. Below are some challenges individuals with DD face and caregiver tips to help work through them (4) (5).

Challenge	Caregiver Tip
Fear of the dentist, dental staff, dental care, dental equipment, etc.	Schedule a "get to know you" visit so the individual can visualize the dentist's office and meet dental staff prior to a dental appointment.
Infrequent oral care (toothbrush, flossing, etc. that is not done routinely)	Find out why the individual is not participating in oral care. Be creative. Is it due to a sensory issue? Is it because the individual cannot hold/grip the toothbrush?
Caregivers who lack DD-related oral healthcare experience or training.	Participate in DD-related oral healthcare trainings for caregivers. (hint: there are resources in this newsletter and oral health trainings available for free!)
Caregivers who fear causing harm when assisting with oral care.	Share your fears and lack of confidence with fellow Care Team members and ask for help and advice. Keep a positive and open attitude about learning new skills.

How to find a dentist for an individual with DD in Virginia:

- If the individual has Medicaid, call DentaQuest at 888-912-3456
- The Virginia Health Catalyst website can help people find dental care based on the age of the individual and their insurance coverage.
- The OIH/DBHDS Dental Team provides dental evaluations, education, exams, and treatment for individuals with intellectual or developmental disability who do not have access to basic dental care:
 - Must be 21 or older.
 - Must have called DentaQuest first.
 - Must have not been able to access a dentist in the past 12 months.
- If the individual meets the criteria above, you can make a referral to the DBHDS OIH Dental program [here](#).

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ABA Snippets ...

The Bountiful Benefits of Reinforcement

In the first installment of this two-part ABA Snippet series on consequences, we explored how behavioral science largely focuses on the significant role that consequences have in shaping a person's future actions (3). We learned that punishment is a type of consequence that decreases the likelihood of a behavior happening again, but it also carries several undesirable side effects that can cause harm (2).

This month we will gather around the table and share why we are thankful for the most important principle of behavior in all behavioral science: reinforcement!

Reinforcement occurs when a behavior is followed by an immediate change in the environment that increases the likelihood of that behavior recurring (1). For instance, when your cousins shower you with praise for your new cranberry sauce recipe, you're more likely to use it again. Their approval acts as reinforcement, motivating you to bring that dish the next year.

Reinforcement comes with a cornucopia of benefits and is an effective way to teach new skills and strengthen relationships. However, sometimes reinforcement efforts may not hit the mark. Here are some tips to ensure your reinforcement strategies are successful this Thanksgiving and beyond.

Set Achievable Goals: Reinforcement only works if it is accessed. If Grandpa can't resist sneaking a pre-dinner bite of the turkey every 10 minutes, offering him an hors d'oeuvre every 5 minutes that he keeps his hands to himself will be more effective than giving him a bite to eat every 20 minutes.

Use Individualized Reinforcers: Not everyone has the same preferences. For example, Uncle Jim doesn't appreciate public praise, so expressing your gratitude for him in private this year would be more effective than doing so while giving thanks at the dinner table.

Immediacy: The more immediate reinforcement is to the behavior, the more effective it will be. Thanking the people that help with dinner cleanup as soon as they start cleaning will be more effective at increasing their cleaning behaviors than waiting to thank them the following week.

See Cooper et al., 2020, for more information on using reinforcement effectively.

Consider using these reinforcement tips to leverage its positive effects, rather than resorting to punishment and dealing with its harmful side effects.

"The way positive reinforcement is carried out is more important than the amount." — B. F. Skinner

You may contact DBHDS about these efforts via nick.vanderburg@dbhds.virginia.gov

References

1. Cooper, J. O., Heron, T. E., & Heward, W. L. (2020). Applied behavior analysis. Pearson Education, Inc.
2. Sidman, M. (1989). Coercion and its fallout. Authors Cooperative.
3. Skinner, B. F. (1938). The behavior of organisms: An experimental analysis. Copley Publishing Group.

DentaQuest - As of July 1, 2021, DentaQuest and DMAS are covering adult dental benefits. The eligible population of members includes adults who are 21 years of age and older and enrolled in Medicaid or FAMIS. The services focus on prevention and restoration. Braces and bridges are not covered.

Services will include the following:

- Diagnostic (x-rays, exams)
- Preventive (cleanings)
- Restorative (fillings)
- Endodontics (root canals)
- Periodontics (gum related treatment)
- Prosthodontics (crowns, partials, and dentures)
- Oral surgery (extractions and other oral surgeries)
- Adjunctive general services (all covered services that do not fall into specific dental categories)



Refer to the Office Reference Manual (ORM) for specific benefit coverage and frequency. The ORM will be available on DentaQuest's provider web portal at <https://www.dentaquest.com/>. Contact DentaQuest at 888.912.3456 for questions related to benefits, and member eligibility.

When calling DentaQuest you can speak with a real customer service representative who can assist you with answering your questions.