



Oral Health Articles

Neurodiversity and how it may impact dental care

Neurodiversity and impacts on dental care

Neurodiversity means that people experience the world in different ways. This includes how the senses process taste, sound, touch, and texture. The strong mint flavour of toothpaste, the foaming sensation in the mouth, or the buzzing of an electric toothbrush can feel overwhelming. For others, these sensations can be calming and reassuring.

Recognising these differences is important. There's no single "right way" to brush your teeth. What matters is creating a routine that feels less stressful, comfortable and achievable.

Toothpaste: Finding the Right Fit

Toothpaste is often the biggest hurdle. Strong mint flavours can taste spicy or have burning sensation, and foaming textures can be overwhelming. Alternatives include:

- Unflavoured or mild flavoured toothpastes
- Children's toothpastes with variety of flavours
- Low-foaming or no foaming options

If toothpaste feels impossible, brushing with water is still better than skipping altogether. Over time, small amounts of toothpaste can be introduced gradually.

Toothbrushes: Manual or Electric?

The right toothbrush can make all the difference. Some people prefer:

- Soft manual brushes with smaller heads
- Angled toothbrushes that reach more easily
- Triple-headed manual toothbrushes for quicker cleaning
- Toothbrushes with interchangeable handles for better gripping and control

Others find electric toothbrushes easier, as they do the work for you. This is especially the case if the electric toothbrush head has a spinning action. But for those sensitive to sound or vibration, an electric toothbrush may be too intense. The best choice is the one that makes brushing feel most comfortable and manageable.

Mouthrinses and Alternatives

Mouthrinses are often used as an adjunct or complementary to the main daily oral care of toothbrushing. Not everyone can tolerate mouthrinse and not everyone will need to use a mouthrinse.

Commercially available mouthrinses often have strong flavours and may have alcohol content. These ingredients can often taste “spicy” or have a “stinging or burning” sensation. This may make it overwhelming for individuals with sensory sensitivities to taste and texture. In these cases, should a mouthrinse be required, the following are some alternatives to commercial mouthrinses:

- Rinsing with plain water after meals
- Using mild formulation mouthrinses with no alcohol and non-mint flavour
- Home formulation of bicarbonate and saltwater rinses

When choosing whether a mouth rinse is suitable, please discuss with your friendly oral health professional on the best formulation for your teeth.

Building a Positive Routine

With the right tools and strategies, oral care at home can become less of a battle and more of a habit that supports health and confidence every day. Here are some recommendations for building a positive routine:

- Set a regular time for brushing: once in the morning and once in the evening.
- Use a timer to make sure you are brushing for two minutes each time.
- Play a favourite song that lasts around 2–3 minutes while you brush.
- Try mobile phone apps designed to track how long and how often you brush.

Finally, remember that building a routine often works best by starting small. Break toothbrushing into smaller steps, such as brushing just a few teeth at a time and gradually increasing the number of teeth you brush. Over time, you’ll build up to brushing your whole mouth, for two minutes, twice a day.

Neurodiversity reminds us that there’s no one-size-fits-all approach to oral care. Each person’s sensory profile and daily needs are unique. The most important thing is finding a routine that feels doable, reduces stress, and helps protect your smile.

