

Managing Saliva and Secretions

Difficulties managing saliva and oral secretions can occur because a person is swallowing less frequently or has reduced awareness of saliva in their mouth.

The following strategies may help improve comfort, safety, and secretion management:

- Sit the person upright, aiming for a 90-degree position where possible.
- Use an appropriate chair, cushions, or pillows for support.
- Keep the person's head aligned with their body. Do not allow the head to tilt backwards or to one side.
- Encourage the person to keep their mouth closed where possible.
- Provide regular verbal reminders to swallow throughout the day. Written reminders or timers may also be helpful for some people.
- Encourage the person to swallow before repositioning, transferring, or leaning forward.
- Offer or encourage regular sips of fluid. Swallowing fluids can also help clear pooled saliva. Good hydration may reduce the thickness and stickiness of secretions, making them easier to manage.
- Provide regular, thorough mouth care, ensuring any dried, stringy, or sticky secretions are removed safely.
- Gently remove secretions that have escaped from the mouth, taking care not to damage the skin. Lip balm or barrier creams may be helpful in preventing soreness and skin breakdown.

Seek further medical advice if:

- The person's secretions are copious and cannot be managed using the advice above.
- The person sounds wet or "gurgly" due to secretions.
- The secretions are causing the person distress, discomfort, or skin damage.
- There are changes in the person's breathing or signs of a chest infection.

Remember:

Consistent positioning, regular oral care, good hydration, and frequent opportunities to swallow can significantly improve the management of oral secretions and support the person's comfort and wellbeing.