OSCE checklist for oral care

An OSCE checklist for oral care covers explaining the task, checking swallowing risk, positioning to prevent choking, cleaning teeth, gums and tongue gently with a soft toothbrush, caring for dentures and lips, and recording what you saw.

OSCE checklist for oral care: steps to practise

1. Clean your hands, introduce yourself, confirm the patient's name and date of birth against the wristband, explain what you will do and gain consent.
2. Check the care plan for swallowing advice, nil by mouth status and any allergies, including to toothpaste ingredients or latex.
3. Collect a soft small-headed toothbrush, toothpaste (low-foaming if advised for a patient with swallowing problems), a cup of water, a bowl, a towel, a denture pot if needed, gloves and an apron. Have suction ready if your policy requires it for a patient at risk of aspiration.
4. Give privacy, clean your hands, put on gloves and an apron, and help the patient sit upright, or turn them on their side if they cannot sit up, so fluid can drain out of the mouth.
5. Place a towel under the chin and the bowl close to the mouth. Remove dentures first if worn.
6. Check the lips, tongue, gums, teeth and inside of the cheeks for dryness, coating, white patches, bleeding, ulcers or loose teeth.
7. Brush the teeth, gums and tongue gently with a small amount of toothpaste, in short strokes. Foam swabs are not suitable for cleaning teeth. If used to moisten the mouth, check the head is firmly attached.
8. Ask the patient to spit out the toothpaste. Offer only small sips to rinse if their swallowing advice allows it. Do not rinse a drowsy or unconscious patient with water.
9. Clean dentures over a bowl of water, rinse them, and return them or store them in a labelled denture pot as the patient and local policy prefer.
10. Dry the face and apply lip balm. Use a water-based product if the patient is on oxygen, as paraffin-based products can be a fire risk.
11. Remove gloves and apron, clean your hands and leave the patient comfortable with the call bell in reach.

12. Record the condition of the mouth and the care given, and report ulcers, bleeding, white patches, pain or swallowing problems to the nurse in charge.

What candidates commonly forget

- Not checking swallowing advice and nil by mouth status first
- Using too much water in a patient at risk of aspiration
- Using a foam swab instead of a toothbrush to clean teeth
- Forgetting dentures or not labelling the denture pot
- Skipping the tongue
- Using a paraffin-based lip balm on a patient receiving oxygen
- Not reporting sores, bleeding or a dry mouth

Local policy comes first

This is our own practice checklist. Your college, hospital or country may do some steps differently. Where local policy and this list disagree, follow local policy.

Practise the hands-on steps with a classmate or in a skills lab, because an AI patient cannot watch your technique. You can practise the talking part with an AI patient, and try one station free with no sign-up. Next, try Personal care for a patient with vomiting and diarrhoea. Back to the nursing foundation OSCE page: nursing foundation OSCE, or see the full OSCE checklist list.

Common questions

What is the OSCE checklist for oral care?

Confirm identity and consent, check swallowing advice, position safely, remove dentures, check the mouth, brush teeth, gums and tongue gently, rinse safely, care for dentures and lips, make the patient comfortable and record findings.

How do I give mouth care to an unconscious patient?

Place them on their side, use a soft toothbrush with very little moisture and low-foaming toothpaste, have suction ready, and watch the airway throughout. Never pour water into the mouth.

What should I report after oral care?

Bleeding gums, ulcers, white patches, a very dry mouth, loose teeth, pain, and any coughing or difficulty swallowing.

Sources

- NMC: standards of proficiency for registered nurses
- NICE CG139: infection prevention and control

Checked 2026-11-13. Fees and rules change, so confirm them with the regulator before you book.