

This leaflet is part of a series written by nurses, doctors and experts with experience in aged care. The series aims to make your journey into residential aged care easier. Look for other leaflets on questions to ask about specific care needs. These can be downloaded at: [www.10questions.org.au](http://www.10questions.org.au)

You may find these leaflets useful when:

- Searching for a high quality residential aged care facility
- Reviewing the quality of your current residential aged care facility
- Deciding between two residential aged care facilities that appear similar.

By law, residential aged care facilities are not required to have registered nurses so it's important to ask the right questions if you need nursing care.

Many staff wear similar uniforms. Just because someone looks like a nurse does not mean they are. Here are the differences:

A **Registered Nurse (RN)** has undertaken a minimum three-year Bachelor of Nursing course. They can undertake nursing procedures, manage pain medication and help prevent unnecessary hospital admissions.

An **Enrolled Nurse (EN)** works under the direction of an RN. Both are licensed by a regulatory body. Licensing ensures professional standards are maintained and protects the public.

**Assistants in Nursing (AIN)/Care Workers/ Care Service Employees (CSE)** are unlicensed. They provide most of the care in residential facilities and community but their level of training is variable.



# IT'S YOUR RIGHT TO ASK

The best way to find a residential aged care facility that suits you is to visit a few.

To find your local ones, or for more information about aged care services contact

**My Aged Care**  
 **1800 200 422**  
[myagedcare.gov.au](http://myagedcare.gov.au)

This leaflet has been developed with input from ADA NSW, Senior Smiles and CPSA.

Endorsed by:



For a full list of supporting organisations please visit [www.10questions.org.au](http://www.10questions.org.au)

If you have concerns about a residential aged care facility contact:



 1800 550 552

 [NSW@agedcarecomplaints.gov.au](mailto:NSW@agedcarecomplaints.gov.au)



# 10 Questions to Ask

## ABOUT DENTAL AND ORAL HEALTH NEEDS IN RESIDENTIAL AGED CARE



[www.10questions.org.au](http://www.10questions.org.au)

*The mouth is part of the body so good oral hygiene is important for your overall health. Oral hygiene is not a luxury and you should be supported to look after your mouth and teeth every day.*

## **1 How will I be supported to look after my mouth and teeth?**

Oral hygiene should happen every day. If you need help to brush your teeth, ask if you will get help when you need it. Check how staff make sure all residents have brushed their teeth, and if there is time during mornings and evenings to ensure this happens. Check if there is a clean storage area for your toothbrush, toothpaste and oral health equipment.

## **2 How will my oral health needs be assessed?**

Oral Health Practitioners\* provide most of the oral and dental treatment in aged care facilities so check what arrangements there are for you to receive their services and how often they visit. Your oral and dental health needs should be included in your care plan along with treatment plans for existing dental conditions or diseases.

## **3 What food options are available?**

A healthy diet is important for your overall health. Check that menus avoid foods and drinks that contain a lot of sugar. Check soft menu options if you have trouble chewing or swallowing. You may need a dietician to assess what foods are appropriate following dental surgery or new dentures and if you need any dietary supplements.

## **4 Can I keep my usual dentist?**

Your usual dentist may not be able to service the area you move to, so check with them first. If not, ask whether staff can arrange for a dentist to come and treat you there. Payment for dental treatment in residential aged care is the same as if you were still at home. You will have to cover the costs of treatment unless you're eligible for free treatment through the public dental system.

## **5 Is there an oral health outreach program in place?**

There may be outreach programs that provide dental or oral health treatment. Ask what arrangements are in place. Your oral health should be properly assessed so check the person providing treatment is a registered dentist, dental hygienist or oral health therapist.

## **6 How will I get to my offsite dentist appointment?**

You may have to cover the cost of transport to and from appointments including the cost of a staff member to accompany you if needed. Staff should help you to organise this. You may be able to apply for Financial Hardship to cover the cost of transport. Check if you are eligible for free dental care in a public dental clinic.

## **7 What fees will I have to pay for my daily oral health care?**

Oral hygiene is a part of general personal care, so you should not be charged any additional fees. You should be provided with toothbrushes, toothpaste and denture cleaning products, but you will need to

pay for extras like dental floss. Ask exactly what you will have to pay extra for and what will be provided.

## **8 What happens if my dentures get damaged or lost?**

Your dentures should be labelled with your name and stored safely when not in use. Check the arrangements for storing and cleaning dentures and what will happen if they are lost. It can take weeks to get new dentures and you may be expected to cover the costs, even if it was staff that lost them.

## **9 Have staff been trained in oral health?**

Staff should know how to help you maintain good oral health and when to call in a dentist or specialist oral health practitioner. Ask if training includes looking after the oral health of people with special needs, particularly people with dementia and people receiving end of life care. Staff turnover can be high so check if all new staff receive training when they are first employed.

## **10 What happens if I need emergency dental care?**

Emergency dental care can be hard to access and may result in a hospital visit so ask about arrangements for contacting an emergency dentist or oral health practitioner, if your usual one is unavailable. For both emergency and routine care, your family or legal guardian may need to give their consent for you to receive treatment. Make sure staff know where to find their contact details.

\*Oral Health Practitioners refers to: Dental Hygienists, Dental Therapists, Oral Health Therapists and Dental Prosthetists. All Oral Health Practitioners work in collaborative relationships with Dentists and must be registered with a licensing body.