

Skills for Living

Occupational Therapy Advice for

Looking after my Body: Hair, Teeth and Nail Care



These tasks often need to be done every day but many children and young people struggle to do them.

- Hair care includes managing the brush / comb, having a hair style completed and being able to have their hair washed and cut.
- Tooth care is important for oral health. It includes preparing the brush, putting on the toothpaste, and brushing all areas of the teeth.
- Nail care is about looking after finger and toe nails through cleaning, cutting / filing.

Building your child's skills

Develop your child's hand and body skills

- To be able to look after their hair, teeth and nails, your child needs to be aware of their body.
- Blindfold games, and copying games like "Simon Says" can help to develop this.

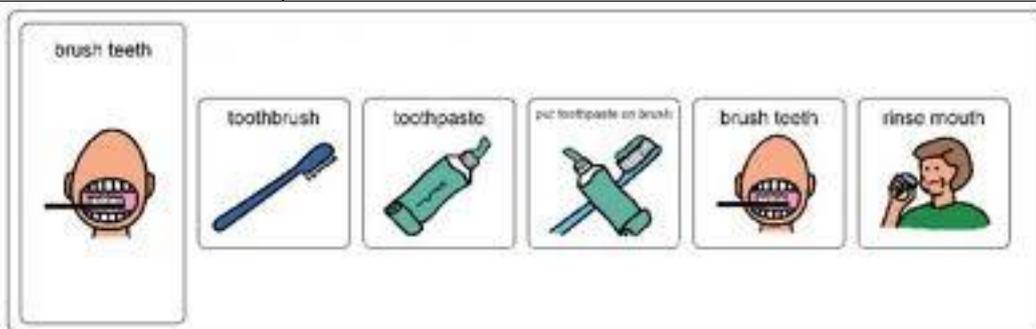
Let your child have a go



- Encourage your child / young person to do the task themselves.
- "My turn, Your Turn": You do a step in the routine for the child in the first instance, then it's their turn to have a go. Taking it in turns makes the activity feel more achievable.

Doing tasks in a sequence or order and using visual supports

- Breaking a task into steps helps your child understand the task and builds in consistency and predictability to reduce stress.
- Use visual aids (e.g. photographs, pictures, symbols). You can use pictures of the child and their own items (hair brush, toothbrush) to make it more personal.



<p>Keep it going...</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give definite time limits to the task e.g. “Let’s count to...” or count as you go along • Use a favourite rhyme or song so your child knows what to expect and when the task will finish • Sing the steps whilst performing each one • Use the strategy: “123 Finished” when cutting a nail so they know what to expect and when it will end. Repeat for each finger until the task is completed.
<p>Break the task down into smaller steps</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For example: Do three nails every night so the routine is regular, but it won’t take very long each time
<p>Modelling</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carry out the task yourself and have your child copy you at the same time. • Make sure you are facing the same direction so left / right doesn’t become a confusion.
<p>Look in the mirror</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage your child to look in the mirror • Visually being able to see the items being used can help a child be in more control and predict what is going to happen.
<p>Hand over hand help</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put your hands over the child’s hands to help them learn how to use an object and complete a task e.g. brushing the back of their hair, cutting nails
<p>How to motivate your child</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use child friendly, favourite cartoon characters designs that may be more motivating (e.g. character brushes, clippers) • Use “now” and “next” pictures of the task to be done and the motivating reward afterwards. E.g. Use a picture to represent the nail cutting with a picture to represent a preferred activity (e.g. snack or TV). Explain to your child that first they will have their nails cut, then they can have their reward. <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;">   <p>Visual Supports</p>  </div>
<p>Reward charts</p> 	<p>Use a daily or weekly reward chart to praise their progress from small steps (just putting the toothbrush in their mouth, having the hair brush passed over the head once) to bigger achievements (e.g. brushing the whole head).</p>

Encouraging independence: Goal, Plan, Do, Check Approach	
GOAL 	What is the Goal? What would the child like to be able to do better? E.g. For example: "Have my nails cut", "Be able to go to the hairdressers and have my hair cut"
PLAN 	How are we going to achieve the goal? This is the step by step plan. Break it down into stages. It is really important to use the child's own words and descriptions e.g. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Massage my hand and nails 2. Hold an electric toothbrush 3. Have mum position the nail clippers 4. I press on mum's fingers when I'm ready to cut 5. Cut three times 6. Done for the first finger!
 DO	This is when the child completes the activity by following their plan. Just do it!
CHECK 	Think back – ask the child – encourage them to think <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did you do it? • What worked well? • What do we need to do differently? • Do we need to change the plan a little? • Add a stage if you need to. • Use rhymes to help the plan e.g. "Brush both sides, the bottom and the top. When they're all done it's time to stop." • Use action words e.g. e.g. press, "brush brush brush", "123 finished", etc.

HAIR CARE

- Give the child a head massage: rub, press and touch the head and ears with firm, deep pressure. Some children prefer to do this themselves.
- Use a firm stroke or pressure as you handle the hair.
- Try different brushes e.g. a larger paddle brush, one with softer bristles or even detangling brushes e.g. a "Tangle Teezer"
- Use conditioner or detangle spray.
- Hold the hair between the tangle and the child's head so the child doesn't feel it being pulled.

Visiting the Hairdresser

Try a mobile hairdresser in a familiar and safe place (e.g. home, Grandma's) or ask around locally as some hairdressers can arrange to use a room just for your child if that helps.

After cutting, air blow cut hair away from the child's neck and ears.

Hair Washing

If your child dislikes tipping their head back or getting soap / water on their face: cover their eyes with a face cloth or visor and use a jug of water or a hand held shower to rinse their hair. Swimming goggles might help.

NAIL CARE

- Nail clippers are quicker than scissors and the child can help when cutting so they feel in control. It also helps them predict what is going to happen..
- Scissors may be quieter so try them if the child dislikes the noise of clippers.
- Soften nails in warm water.
- Give the child a hand massage before (and after) cutting nails: rub, press on the nail bed with firm, deep pressure. Some children prefer to do this themselves.
- Try getting the child to hold a vibrating toy or toothbrush before each nail is cut.
- Cut one nail per night, after 10 nights the task is complete and you can start again to keep the routine going, or move onto toe nails then back to finger nails.
- Some children prefer the sensation of having their nails filed, rather than cut.

TOOTH CARE

- Toothpaste: Experiment with flavours and colours of toothpaste, un-flavoured and non-foaming pastes are also options (and are available online or from the Dentist).
 - *Remember: it is better to brush without toothpaste than not to brush at all.*
- Toothbrushes:
 - Alternative brushes are available e.g. Finger toothbrushes, soft brush heads or an electric toothbrush (as the vibration may be calming).
 - Use flashing or favourite cartoon character brushes that may be more motivating
 - Try a Nuk silicon toothbrush (www.nuk.co.uk) initially then move onto normal bristles.
 - Try a Collis curved toothbrush (www.fledglings.co.uk) (this brushes all three sides of the teeth at the same time)
- Use a song or a fun app e.g. "Aqua fresh brush time". Give definite time limits to the task.
- Water temperature: some children may prefer warm water when rinsing their teeth.



Sensory strategies to help hair, nail and tooth care
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide Deep Pressure immediately before and after the task (please see examples below* for suitable activities).
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Touch: children often find light touch uncomfortable so use firm, consistent pressure and even downward strokes where possible.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Noise: consider turning off bathroom extractor fans, be mindful of noisy equipment (toothbrushes, hair trimmers etc.) Use ear defenders to block out unwanted noises.• Use music or a playlist to make the environment and task more appealing to the child

- Lighting: Be aware of bathroom lighting levels, consider using other rooms for completing tasks if your child struggles with bright lights

Use of social stories:

- <https://www.autism.org.uk/about/strategies/social-stories-comic-strips.aspx>
- <https://www.yourtherapysource.com/blog1/2017/11/18/write-social-story-visual-supports/>

***Before doing hair, nail or tooth care, try one of these deep pressure activities to help your child calm and get ready for the task. The first three activities can also be done during a task like tooth brushing. It can also help to do a deep pressure activity after the task is finished:**

1. Massage the jaw area / scalp / hands and nails before and immediately after brushing / cutting.
2. Wrap a blanket around the child or suggest they cuddle and squeeze a large toy, cushion or pillow e.g. during tooth brushing
3. Get the child to interlock their hands and press down on top of their head / shoulders / jaw line. You can help to make sure gentle but constant pressure is applied.
4. Play “hot dog” or “squish”: Sandwich the child between pillows, or roll them up in a blanket (with their head out). Stop if the child is uneasy.
5. Sit in an oversized beanbag chair for snugness around the head and body; try adding a heavy blanket too.
6. Try rolling a gym ball, or other large ball up and down the length of the child’s body to create deep pressure.
7. Give a “bear hug” where the child faces away from you and you wrap your arms around them and squeeze firmly.
8. Using the flats of your hands press firmly down the length of the child’s body whilst they lie on their front. They may prefer you to lay a cushion on thrrm and press down of that.



Websites and online links for more information

CBBC: Small Potatoes: Today’s the Perfect Day: Ruby and her friends head off to the barbershop to get their hair styled in this Motown music video.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b011ld08>

<https://www.nhsggc.org.uk/kids/resources/ot-activityinformation-sheets/hair-cutting/>

<https://www.nhsggc.org.uk/kids/resources/ot-activityinformation-sheets/nail-cutting/>

Visual Aids
for learning

<https://www.nhsggc.org.uk/media/245583/visual-aid-for-getting-a-haircut.pdf>

<https://www.nhs.uk/media/245580/visual-aid-for-teeth-brushing-small-images.pdf>

Lemon Lime Adventures www.lemonlimeadventures.com

Information on Learning, Parenting ideas and Sensory activities and ideas

Growing Hands on Kids www.growinghandsonkids.com

Encouraging independence – one activity at a time

Hands On activities – what to expect at different ages

OT activities

Child Development resources

MamaOT www.mamaot.com

Tips and tricks for parents and carers

Independence Skills

The Inspired Treehouse www.theinspiredtreehouse.com

Easy to use activities that are designed to promote all kinds of developmental skills for children.

Useful information for both home and school

Raising a Sensory Smart Child www.sensorysmarts.com

Ideas and activities for helping children with sensory processing difficulties

Pinterest www.pinterest.com

An online pinboard / noticeboard for collecting and searching for all kinds of information and ideas

You will need to put words in the search box for the topic you are looking for e.g. “ideas to help children brush their hair / teeth”

It will come back with lots of ideas for you to look at and save if you want to.

You can create your own pinterest boards of ideas that you find most useful and want to save for later.