

General Mouth Care for Oncology Patients

Patient Information

Having a healthy mouth is important for anyone receiving chemotherapy and/or radiation therapy.

This leaflet outlines the side effects of chemotherapy or radiation therapy that can affect your mouth and provides information on how to minimise any discomfort you may experience.

The side effects of chemotherapy or radiation therapy which may affect your mouth include:

- taste changes
- tender/sore or bleeding gums
- dry mouth
- “thrush” or candida infection
- mucositis – redness, swelling and ulceration of the mouth membranes.



These side effects can affect your ability to eat and/or drink during treatment.

What can you do

Following a simple routine will help keep your mouth healthy.

Brush your teeth twice daily with a soft toothbrush, using fluoride toothpaste. Rinse your mouth before brushing so that the toothpaste has prolonged contact with your teeth.

Rinse your mouth with water after food. A good swish and spit ensures food debris is removed. If commercial mouth washes are used, they should be alcohol free. If you experience a sore mouth or ulcers, please speak to a member of your treatment team for advice.

Clean between your teeth daily – using dental floss or tape or other interdental tool. This must be done gently to avoid gum irritation.

Removal of dentures will help minimise the risk of ulcers or bleeding gums under the dentures.

If you have dentures, remove them:

- before sleep
- when using a mouthwash
- when your denture is causing pain.

Soak dentures overnight in a denture cleaning product.

Other measures you can take

- Keep well hydrated
- Avoid alcohol, smoking and caffeine
- Use lip balm
- Maintain a balanced diet with high protein foods.

Useful Mouthwash Recipes

You can use either of the following recipes when you have a sore mouth or ulcers.

1. Saline Mouthwash

Dissolve ¼ teaspoon of salt in 1 cup of lukewarm water. Rinse mouth well and spit out. Use a full cup of mouthwash at least four times a day, including on waking and before going to bed.

2. Bicarbonate Mouthwash

Dissolve ¼ -½ teaspoon of bicarbonate of soda (baking soda, available from supermarket), in 1 cup of luke warm water. Rinse mouth well and spit out. Use full cup of mouthwash at least four times a day, including on waking and before going to bed.

If you get a sore mouth or have difficulty swallowing here are some tips:

- Inform your treatment team
- Eat soft, smooth or blended foods e.g. soups, yoghurt, poached eggs, milk puddings, finely chopped stewed meat in sauce or gravy
- Avoid food or drinks which cause you discomfort e.g. hot or cold, spiced, acidic or rough crunchy foods
- Simple relievers may be helpful. Ask your treatment team about what pain relief will help
- If the pain is severe stronger pain relief may be required. You should discuss this with your doctor/nurse/radiation therapist.

If you get a dry mouth

- Use one of the mouthwash recipes 2 hourly or as often as needed
- Take regular sips of sugar-free fluids or suck on ice blocks/chips
- Chewing sugar-free gum may help
- Keep your lips moist with a lip balm or moisturiser
- If your urine becomes darker you should tell a member of your treatment team.

Tell your doctor/nurse/radiation therapist if you have:

- A dry mouth
- Ulcers
- Sore or bleeding gums
- White/yellow patches in your mouth
- Toothache
- Pain in your mouth or throat
- Problems eating or drinking
- Ill-fitting dentures
- Other unrelieved symptoms or concerns.

If you would like further advice or help

Telephone 03 364 0020 and ask to speak to your nurse/radiation therapist/doctor.