

Oral Care Instructions for People Undergoing Bone Marrow Transplant

Your mouth will undergo some changes both during and after bone marrow transplant. The purpose of these instructions is to explain these changes and give some suggestions as to how you can protect your teeth and keep your mouth healthy.

How can a bone marrow transplant affect salivary glands?

About 30-40 out of 100 patients (30-40%) who have bone marrow transplant experience changes in their salivary glands. This results in a decrease in saliva flow. This is sometimes called “xerostomia”, or dry mouth, and can be annoying.

How can I alleviate dry mouth?

- drink plenty of water or take frequent sips of water
- humidify your home
- chew sugar free (xylitol based) gum or candy

There are some mouth rinses and gels that are also recommended to relieve dry mouth symptoms:

- Biotene oral balance gel
- Stoppers 4 Dry Mouth spray

Choose mouthwash without alcohol and toothpaste without whitening and tartar-fighting properties to decrease irritation:

- Crest Pro Health Mouth rinse
- Biotene Mouthwash
- Biotene Dry Mouth toothpaste
- Any children’s tooth paste

How do I prevent tooth decay?

Saliva plays a very important role in preventing tooth decay (cavities). You will not only be experiencing a reduction in amount in saliva, but also a change in its decay-preventing properties. Follow these recommendations:

- a) Before bedtime, brush for at least five (5) minutes. Floss. Use a regular soft or electric toothbrush and take care to clean well at the gum line, as this is where plaque develops.
- b) Use fluoride gel every night by using the “Brush-on” technique: Place a pea-sized portion of fluoride gel on your toothbrush. Brush on all surfaces of your teeth; try to use your brush to squeeze the fluoride in between your teeth. After one full minute, spit out the excess. Don’t eat, drink, or rinse for one-half hour.
- c) Reduce or stop eating high sugar foods and drinks such as Coca-Cola, candy, etc.
- d) If you must have high sugar foods (Pediasure, Ensure) rinse your mouth with water to loosen sugar and prevent it from sticking to teeth. Drink at least 1 cup/glass of water after having high sugar foods.
- e) Continue regular dental visits every 3 to 6 months. Early detection of cavities is very important so that they can be filled when small and your prevention techniques can be evaluated. Your family dentist should still be comfortable treating you even though you’ve had a bone marrow transplant. If your dentist has any questions or concerns, they should feel free to call us for advice.
- f) Consider chewing gum to increase salivary flow. Gums that contain xylitol (Spry, Trident) or calcium phosphate (Trident Extracare) may also prevent tooth decay.

Studies have shown that unfortunately your saliva amount may not return to normal levels even years after bone marrow transplant. For this reason, the fluoride should be used for the rest of your life.

Will I have mouth sores?

The soft tissues in your mouth will normally replace cells on a regular basis. Transplant slows down this process during and for a period of 1-2 months after treatment. This is called **mucositis**. Combined with the dryness, your cheeks can become quite uncomfortable. We recommend that you rinse with a salt and baking soda rinse, as this creates a buffer against the acids which tend to burn mouth tissue.

- Mix 1/8 tsp. salt and 1/8 tsp baking soda in a cup of water and rinse. Do this as often as you wish. If you find the tissues are still uncomfortable after this, please let us know and we can discuss other solutions.

It is important to realize that **you** play the most important role in preventing dental problems. Sticking to a preventive regimen as described above, plus regular recall visits to your dentist will help. In addition, we are always available to answer any questions for you or your family dentist regarding the impact of radiation therapy on your oral health.

What are the oral health care instructions for infants and children?

Consult with a pediatric or local dentist and establish a regular dentist by 12 months of age. Routine dental check-ups are recommended every 3-6 months, depending on the stage of treatment.

Guidance for primary caregivers:

We understand that your child needs to eat, drink and take medications. However, it is very important to note the high sugar content in milk, juice, high-calorie supplements and medications in order to make them more flavorful. Paying careful attention to sugar content can help prevent unnecessary pain and infection from dental decay. Here are some suggestions to follow:

Diet:

- Decrease sugar exposure by restricting feeding (breastmilk, bottled-milk, pediasure) to meal times with at least 2 hours between feedings.
- Avoid feeding at will or allowing your child to fall asleep while feeding.
- Do not fill the bottle or sippy cup with milk, chocolate milk, pediasure or juice and allow your child to carry this around. Have your child drink this in one sitting.
- If frequent feedings are necessary, wash teeth with a wash cloth or rinse the mouth with water after each feeding.
- If your child carries a sippy cup or bottle around, fill it with water.
- Medications are high in sugar content to make them more flavorful. Do not let your child fall asleep immediately after taking medications. Wash teeth with a wash cloth or rinse the mouth with water after taking medications.
- Avoid sharing food or drink with your child, especially if active decay is present in the mouth.

Oral hygiene for infants:

- Clean your child's teeth with a wash cloth or soft toothbrush as soon as they start showing.
- By age 1, brush teeth with a regular tooth brush and water. Do not use toothpaste until your child learns to spit.
- Brush with a pea-size amount of fluoridated toothpaste as soon as your child has learned to spit excess.

Who can I call if I have questions?

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