Managing Mouth Sores During Cancer Treatment

What is Radiation and Chemotherapy induced mucositis (mouth sores)?

Patients receiving radiation to the head and neck and/or chemotherapy are commonly impacted by some degree of oral mucositis. Mucositis is inflammation of the oral tissue which may result in redness, ulcerations, pain, difficulty eating, and/or difficulty drinking and may increase the risk for infections. It is important to talk with your doctor and obtain support early if you are having any concerns in your mouth.

Management of mouth sores:

Many home remedies, over-the-counter, and prescription options are available that may help reduce symptoms related to mouth sores. Try the following home remedies to reduce mouth sores and pain:

- Keep your mouth moist by drinking water throughout the day.
- Rinse with ¼ tsp salt and ¼ tsp baking soda in 8 oz of water and rinse throughout the day. If the salt irritates your mouth, omit the salt and use ½ tsp baking soda in 8 oz water. These solutions may aid in moistening of tissue and prevention of infection.
- Suck on ice chips or popsicles

Consider over-the-counter options which include:

- Dry mouth products – Available in most grocery stores, pharmacies, or online.
- Aloe vera mouthwash – Follow package instructions.
- Coconut oil- Coat mouth with oil and spit out excess several times per day.
- Systemic pain-relieving medicines. Talk with your doctor about taking anti-inflammatory and pain control medications such as ibuprofen and acetaminophen.
Prescription medications:
- If your symptoms are not controlled by home remedies or over-the-counter therapies talk to your doctor about options for prescription medications such as a magic mouthrinse, topical anesthetic mouthrinse, and/or additional systemic pain-relieving medications. Please use as directed.

Additional pain-reducing strategies you may find helpful include:
- Exercise
- Acupuncture
- Cognitive behavioral therapy
- Distraction,
- Relaxation and guided imagery
- Psychotherapy
- Hypnosis
- support groups
- Individual counseling

Please alert your dentist and oncology team of any questions or concerns so that your team may best support you throughout your treatment.