

Mouth Care During Chemotherapy and Radiation Therapy

How does cancer treatment affect the mouth and throat?

Some types of chemotherapy and radiation therapy can harm your teeth, gums and the lining of your mouth. Most mouth and throat problems go away after chemotherapy or radiation ends, but during treatment you may have:

- Painful spots or sores in your mouth and lips
- Changes in taste and smell

How can I care for my mouth or throat during and after treatment?

- Gently brush your teeth at least twice a day with a soft bristled toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste. If commercial toothpaste is too harsh or causes pain, you can brush with baking soda and water.
- Floss at least once a day, unless your doctor tells you otherwise.
- Use salt and soda rinses. Mix the following ingredients:
 - ¼ teaspoon salt
 - ¼ teaspoon of baking soda
 - 8 oz cup of warm water

Take small sips and swish it around in your mouth, spit and then rinse with plain water.

- Sip water throughout the day so that your mouth stays moist.
- Place a humidifier next to your bed when sleeping or napping. This will keep the air that you breathe moist. Change the water once a day and clean the humidifier as directed.
- If needed, continue fluoride treatments with your dentist.

How do I treat mouth pain and dryness?

There are several ways to treat pain and dryness. Some require a prescription from your health care provider, and some you can buy over-the-counter.

Prescription options:

- **MuGard®**. Rinse with 5 ml of MuGard® every 6 hours. Do not eat or drink anything for 1 hour after you rinse with MuGard®.
- **Magic mouthwash**. Mix ½ teaspoon each of liquid Maalox® and liquid Benadryl®. Swish and spit every six hours as needed.

Over-the-counter options:

You can use more than one of these products at the same time.

- **Aloe Vera mouth wash**. Follow package directions.
- **CloSyS® mouth wash**. This is a non-alcohol based mouth rinse. Follow package directions.
- **Coconut oil**. Gently swish back and forth through the teeth. Rinse well with water.
- **Prevention® Oncology mouth rinse**. Purchase the bottle with the red label. If you cannot find this item at your local pharmacy, check with your pharmacist to see if they can order it for you. It is available online.
- **Xylitol containing products** such as Xylimelts®, ACT® Dry Mouth Lozenges and sugar-free gum.
- **Dry mouth sprays and artificial saliva**.
- **Lubricants and mouth rinses** such as Aquoral® and Biotene® products.

What if I continue to have mouth or throat pain?

If you still have mouth or throat pain, you may want to avoid the following items that may irritate the mouth and gums:

- Toothpaste with sodium lauryl sulfate, anti-tartar chemicals and whiteners.
- Foods that are spicy or salty.
- Acidic foods such as citrus fruits.
- Foods that are sharp, hard or crunchy, such as potato chips.
- Hot and cold foods.
- Sugar-based candy or soft drinks.
- Alcoholic beverages.

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