



## Mouth Care During Your Treatment

This information explains how to care for your mouth during cancer treatment.

### About Mucositis

Some cancer treatments, including radiation therapy to the head and neck may affect the cells that are in your mouth and digestive tract. This is known as mucositis.

Mucositis can cause redness, swelling, tenderness and sores on the lining of your mouth, tongue and lips. You may experience some mouth and throat discomfort that can make it hard to eat or swallow. These symptoms may begin 3-10 days after treatment starts. How quickly they go away depends on your immune system and the treatment you're receiving.

### Caring for Your Mouth During Your Cancer Treatment

#### Brushing

- Brush your teeth and tongue gently after each meal and at bedtime. Use a small, soft-bristle toothbrush. If your mouth is too sore for a regular toothbrush, you can get a soft or extra soft one. Most stores have several options and they can also be found on Amazon.
- Change your toothbrush every 3-4 months or more often if needed.
- Use a fluoride toothpaste or baking soda with fluoride
- If you have a set of dentures, a bridge or a dental prosthesis, take it out and clean it each time you clean your mouth. You can keep wearing it if it fits well and does not irritate your mouth. Take it out of your mouth while you sleep. If you develop any irritation, keep it out of your mouth as much as possible. You can massage your gums for comfort.

#### Flossing

If you have not flossed regularly before treatment, don't start flossing now. If you have been flossing routinely you should continue to do so.

#### Rinsing

Rinse your mouth 4 times a day or more often as needed. Use an alcohol-free rinse such as one of the rinses listed below:

- $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon regular table salt and  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon baking soda mixed with 4 ounces of water.
- Plain water
- Commercially available products such as Biotene® PBF Oral Rinse or BetaCell™ Oral Rinse, etc.

Don't use rinses at very hot or cold temperatures.

Swish and gargle well for 15-30 seconds, then spit out the rinse.

#### Moisturizing your lips

- Apply lip balm frequently
- Do not apply lip moisturizers 4 hours before radiation therapy to the head and neck.

#### Managing Mouth Pain During Your Cancer Treatment

If you have mouth pain during your cancer treatment you should **avoid**:

- Tobacco
- Alcohol
- Commercial mouthwash that has alcohol such as Scope® and Listerine®
- Salty foods and foods that contain strong spices (such as pepper, chili powder, horseradish, curry powder and Tabasco® sauce)
- Citrus fruits and juices such as orange, lemon, lime, grapefruit and pineapple
- Tomatoes
- Hard, dry or coarse foods such as toast, crackers, raw vegetables, potato chips and pretzels
- Very hot or cold foods and liquids.
- Sugary foods and drinks
- Caffeine

#### Managing symptoms

##### About medication

If you have a few small painful areas, your doctor may prescribe an anesthetic (numbing medication) such as viscous lidocaine 2%. You can apply it to the painful areas using a cotton swab. Apply it every hour as needed.

If you feel pain in most of your mouth and throat, your doctor may prescribe medication to coat your whole mouth such as Healios, GelClair® or viscous lidocaine 2% or “Magic Mouthwash.”

- Swish, gargle and spit out 1 tablespoon of the medication 3-4 times a day depending on the prescription instructions. Do not swallow the medication.
- Healios products are also available at some CVS or Rite Aid locations or online at the pharmacy website.

## Taste issues

- Use rinses to keep mouth clean and moist.
- Try adding fruit to water such as lemon, lime, fresh berries, etc if water tastes bad.
- Marinate beef, pork or chicken in teriyaki sauce, sweet and sour sauce or citrus juices or wine.
- Tart things may improve the flavor of other foods during treatment
- If food tastes bland, try seasonings such as oregano, basil, rosemary, cinnamon, dill, cayenne, mint and lemon (caution if you have mouth sores as the spicier items may irritate).
- If food tastes too sweet, try adding sour or bitter things such as frozen cranberries to a smoothie, etc.
- If food tastes metallic try sucking on fresh citrus fruit slices. Chew sugar-free gum. Use plastic utensils and glass cookware.
- Do not eat 1-2 hours before chemotherapy or radiation therapy and for up to 3 hours after therapy, if possible.
- Try *Synsepalum dulcificum* “miracle fruit.” This may mask unpleasant tastes for a short period of time.
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  - Metallic Taste - add a little sweetener such as grade B maple syrup or agave nectar and a squeeze of lemon. You can also try adding fat such as a nut cream or butter.
  - Tastes too sweet – Start by adding 6 drops of lemon or lime juice. Keep adding it in small increments until the sweet taste becomes muted.
  - Tastes too salty – add ¼ teaspoon of lemon juice. It erased the taste of salt.
  - Bitter taste – Add a little sweetener, like maple syrup or agave nectar.
  - Tastes like cardboard – Add more sea salt until the flavor of the dish moves toward the front of the mouth. A spritz of fresh lemon juice also helps.
  - Trouble swallowing or mouth sores – add fat, such as nut cream, to your food. Eat blended or pureed foods such as blended soups, smoothies or granitas. Stay away from ginger, curry, or red pepper flakes and other strong spices.

## Trouble swallowing

Here are some suggestions to help make swallowing easier:

- If your mouth is dry, rinse it just before eating to moisten it and stimulate your taste buds.
- Eat warm or cool foods. Don't eat very hot or very cold foods.
- Eat soft moist, bland foods in small bites and chew them well.
- Use sauces and gravies
- Moisten foods with yogurt, milk, soy milk or water.
- Dip dry foods in liquids.
- Blend or puree your food.
- Avoid things that can irritate your throat such as alcoholic beverages, tart or acidic fruits and juices, spicy foods, pickled foods and tobacco.
- Sip plenty of water throughout the day to be sure you have enough liquids.

## Dry mouth

To manage dry mouth, drink sips of water often throughout the day. You can also use:

- A spray bottle to squirt water into your mouth
- Over the counter mouth moisturizer such as Biotene® Oral Balance, Salivart® Oral Moisturizer and Mouth Kote® Dry Mouth Spray
- Biotene® Gum, sugar-free sour candies
- A humidifier in the room that you're in

## Trouble eating

You may have trouble eating due to your mouth pain. If you do, here are some suggestions to make sure you are getting all the nutrients you need.

- Tell your doctor and nurse if you're not eating well. They may arrange for you to see a dietitian.
- Drink nutritional supplements such as Carnation® Instant Breakfast and Ensure®.
- Add protein powders to broths, soups, cereals and beverages.
- Add extra fats such as butter, oil and cream
- Eat multiple high protein, high calorie small meals throughout the day rather than fewer large meals. Try having a small meal every 2-3 hours.
- Choose soft, easy to chew food.

## Call your doctor or nurse if you have:

- A temperature of 100.4 F (38.0 C) or higher
- New redness, sores, or white patches in your mouth
- Bleeding of your gums or mouth
- Difficulty or pain when you swallow
- Pain that does not get better with the above interventions and pain medication
- Any questions or concerns