

# How to Care for Your Mouth During Cancer Treatment

## General Information

The guidelines listed below are general. Follow your doctor's or therapist's directions.

## Visit Your Dentist

- Cancer treatments may raise your risk of problems with your teeth and gums.
- See your dentist before your cancer treatment.
- He or she will give you tips for caring for your teeth and gums during your cancer treatment.

## What To Do Every Day

### Look at Your Mouth and Gums

- Tell a member of your health care team if you notice changes such as:
  - swelling
  - white coating
  - sores
  - bleeding.

### Brush and Floss

- Brushing and flossing is an important part of your daily routine.
- Use a soft-bristled toothbrush.
- Use a toothpaste that has fluoride, is low-abrasive, doesn't have sodium lauryl sulfate or other detergents, such as:
  - Biotene®
  - Tom's of Maine Clean and Gentle®
  - Sensodyne® Pronamel or Iso-Active® Multi-Action Foaming Gel.

- Use a mouth wash or rinse that does not have alcohol, such as:
  - ACT® Total Care
  - Listerine® Zero
  - Colgate® Total Advanced Proshield
  - Biotene®
  - Mouthkote®.
- Floss after each meal. Use thin-coated floss.
- Don't floss if it causes your gums to bleed or if your doctor or dentist tells you not to floss.
- If possible, brush your tongue or use a tongue scraper every day to remove bacteria (germs).

### Care for Your Lips

- Keep your lips moist.
- Use a lip moisturizer. When you are in the sun, use one with sunscreen (SPF 15 or higher).

### Do Mouth and Jaw Exercises

- Slowly open your mouth as wide as you can and then close it. Repeat 5 times.
- Slowly slide your jaw side to side 5 times.
- Stick out your tongue as far as it will go. Pull it back into your mouth. Repeat 5 times.
- If you are working with a speech or physical therapist, follow his or her directions.
- Chew Biotine® Dry Mouth Gum.

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## Keep Your Mouth Moist

- Keep a bottle of water with you at all times. Sip water often.
- Choose tap water that has fluoride instead of bottled water.
- Drink 6 to 8 eight-ounce glasses of liquids every day. Nutritional supplements count.
- You may add lemon or lime to water to add flavor.
- Use a straw to make drinking easier.
- You may suck on ice chips. Don't chew on the ice.
- Avoid beverages that have caffeine (tea, coffee, soda) and alcohol because they can dry your mouth.
- Keep a supply of sugar-free hard candies or gum to suck on or chew. They help your glands make saliva.
- Use a cool mist humidifier to add moisture to the air.
- Use a salt and soda rinse to keep your mouth moist and to thin your secretions.
  - Mix ½ teaspoon baking soda and ½ teaspoon of salt in 20 ounces of water (tap, filtered or bottled water is OK).
  - Take mouthful and swish it around for about 30 seconds or as you are able. Spit it out.
  - Repeat every 2 to 3 hours while you are awake.

## Denture Use

- If you wear dentures, wear them as you normally do.
- Take your dentures out to do your mouth care and to look at your gums.
- Clean your dentures with an "antimicrobial cleanser," such as Polident® or a store-brand cleanser.

## Food and Beverage Tips

- Rinse your mouth before you eat to help moisten your mouth.
- Rinse your mouth after you eat to help remove any food particles.
- If you are able, drink and eat dairy products, such as milk and cheese. The calcium may help decrease cavities.
- Eat foods that are cold, soft, moist or bland. They may feel soothing.
- Foods that are hot, frozen, crunchy, dry, spicy or sugary may irritate your throat and mouth.
- Use a blender to blend, chop, grind or mash food (including fruits and vegetables).
- Drink juices that are low in acid, such as pear, peach or apricot.
- Avoid beverages that are high in acid, such as orange juice, tea and soda. They can irritate your tongue and mouth.
- If your mouth is feeling uncomfortable or in pain, coat your mouth before eating with a cream or gel (such as Orajel™ or Orabase-B) to numb your mouth and ease discomfort.
- Take pain medicine 30 to 60 minutes before you eat. Follow your doctor's directions.

## What To Do Twice a Week

Weigh yourself. For instance, every Monday and Thursday.

If you are losing weight, tell your nurse or doctor. Weight loss may be a sign you are dehydrated.