

Information Sheet: Cancer Treatment & Mouth Problems

Sometimes you may not be able to eat properly because your illness or chemotherapy has affected your mouth or throat. It is important that you keep your mouth clean and healthy to help prevent infection.

What things can I do?

- ❖ Keep your mouth clean. Clean your teeth after meals and at bedtime, using a soft toothbrush. An electric toothbrush is ideal.
- ❖ Gently floss your teeth once a day if you usually do so. (Check with your doctor first, as your gums may bleed if your platelets are low).
- ❖ If you have dentures, remove them and clean them after every meal.
- ❖ Rinse your mouth with water after eating.
- ❖ Avoid mouthwashes that contain alcohol. Ask your dentist or nurse to recommend alcohol free alternatives.
- ❖ Use a torch to check your mouth and lips for sores each morning after mouth care.
- ❖ Try to visit your dentist before starting chemotherapy, so that any problems with your teeth or gums can be treated before chemotherapy starts.
- ❖ Drink plenty of fluids. Drink at least 8 glasses per day to keep your mouth moist and fresh.
- ❖ Keep your lips moist by using a lip balm.

How can I manage my sore mouth?

- ❖ Eat soft foods that need minimal chewing and are easy to swallow.
- ❖ Avoid food and drinks that are either very hot or very cold.
- ❖ Avoid highly spiced food.
- ❖ Some fruits, such as pineapple, oranges and lemons, can irritate your mouth. Avoid eating them if you find they cause a problem.
- ❖ Avoid rough, dry foods such as toast and raw vegetables. If you fancy a biscuit, 'dunk' it in a warm drink.
- ❖ Minimise alcohol, especially spirits. However, if you enjoy an occasional drink, check with your doctor or dietician that it is okay to continue.

What can I do to manage my dry mouth?

- ❖ It may help to have your meals moist: use gravies or sauces.
- ❖ Have frequent sips of fluid with your meals. Try to avoid drinks that contain sugar to reduce the risk of tooth decay.

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- ❖ Cut your food into small pieces. Prolonged chewing, especially meat, can make eating difficult and tiring.
- ❖ Tangy foods, such as lemons, fruit-flavoured sweets or mint-flavoured sweets, may help to stimulate saliva in your mouth. However, if your mouth is sore as well as dry, you may find that chewing hard sweets makes it worse. Try sugar-free sweets or chew sugar-free gums instead.
- ❖ You may find sucking on icy poles helpful to freshen your mouth. These can be flavoured with cordials or fruit juice. Rinse your mouth afterwards.
- ❖ Keep your mouth clean and moist. Sugar-free gum and saliva substitutes may help keep your mouth moist.
- ❖ Rinse your mouth four to six times a day, especially after meals, with a solution of salt and baking soda (¼teaspoon of salt and ¼ teaspoon of baking soda in 1 cup of warm water).
- ❖ Avoid smoking.
- ❖ Ask your health care team about artificial saliva.

Tell your Doctor or Nurse if:

- You develop red/white areas in your mouth
- You are avoiding eating and drinking because of mouth problems
- You have bleeding in your mouth
- The pain in your mouth is severe and you are finding it hard to swallow.

We encourage you to speak to your healthcare team if you have any concerns about your mouth problems.

We welcome feedback at:

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Bairnsdale Regional Health Service is located on the traditional land of the Gunai Kurnai people.

My team is **BRHS**